NATION

Request for water, food led to Pune rape accused's arrest

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BUSINESS

Bloodbath on D-Street: Markets tank nearly 2%

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SPORTS

Australia qualifies for semis after rain washes out game

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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The Executive member of Ruyat-E-Hilaal Committee, Karnataka announced that the moon was not sighted on 28 February. Therefore, first taraveeh will be on 1 March and first saum will be on 2 March. Ramadan will commence in Saudi Arabia on 1 March.

BJP's Sriramulu hints at DKS joining BJP

MYSURU, 28 FEB

Senior BJP leader and former minister B Sriramulu on Friday said that going by the swift political developments in the State, the Siddaramaiah government likely to collapse on the lines of what happened to the previous Maharashtra government. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, he said politics is not like stagnant water. The State has witnessed a lot of political developments, even removal of incumbent chief ministers such as Veerendra Patil and Devaraj Urs when they were effectively functioning as leaders in Congress. Symptoms of such developments can be seen in the present political scenario in the State, he said. *—Salar News*

SC: Rohingya kids can seek govt school admission

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Supreme Court on Friday said that Rohingya children can approach government schools for admission and in case of denial, they can move the high court. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh disposed of a plea seeking direction to the authorities of Delhi government to grant admission to Rohingya children having UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) cards in public schools. The bench said it passed a similar order in another PIL seeking the same relief. Gonsalves said the court may record its direction in the order which will pave the way for 500 students to get admissions in government schools. *—PTI*

Microsoft's Skype to shut down after two decades

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

Microsoft will shut down Skype from May, a post on the official X handle said. The internet-based phone and video service that was one of the most the dominant way of staying connected in the mid 2000s. The shutdown comes 14 years after Microsoft bought the service for $8.5, the company's largest ever acquisition at the time. Skype's popularity had faded in recent years with the rise of competing products. "Starting in May 2025, Skype will no longer be available. Over the coming days you can sign in to Microsoft Teams Free with your Skype account to stay connected with all your chats and contacts," the post said. *—Agencies*

India's GDP rebounds to 6.2% in Q3, lower than last year

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Indian economy grew by 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, recovering sequentially from seven-quarter lows, but the expansion came in lower than last year and at a time when it faces growing headwinds from the threat of a US tariff war.

The 6.2 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was higher than a revised reading of 5.6 per cent expansion in the July-September 2024 period, according to data released by the Statistics Ministry on Friday. It was, however, lower than the RBI's estimate of 6.8 per cent for the period.

For the full 2024-25 fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025), the government now pegs GDP growth at 6.5 per cent, marginally higher than its initial estimate of 6.4 per cent but below the revised growth rate of 9.2 per cent for 2023-24.

The growth in the current fiscal and less than 7 per cent expected in the next will keep India as the fastest-expanding major economy.

It also released the second advance estimate for the current fiscal and pegged the economic growth at 6.5 per cent against 6.4 per cent estimated in the first advance estimate released in January.

The manufacturing sector's output growth, as per the gross value added (GVA), in the third quarter dipped to 3.5 per cent from 14 per cent.

Mining and quarrying production growth slowed to 1.4 per cent in the third quarter from 4.7 per cent a year ago. The economy has expanded 6.1 per cent in April-December 2024 down from 9.5 per cent a year ago. *—PTI*

India, EU set year-end deadline to conclude FTA

Defence & security ties talking points; no word on carbon tax

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Friday agreed to conclude an ambitious India-EU free trade deal by this year amid fears that the Trump administration's threat of higher tariffs could adversely impact the global economy.

In their talks, both the leaders also decided to expand two-way defence cooperation, especially in the Indo-Pacific with Vonder Leyen announcing that the European Union (EU) was looking at firming up a security and defence pact with India in line with its partnerships with close allies Japan and South Korea.

The deadline for concluding the trade deal that would be the largest of its kind globally came over 17 years after the two sides first began negotiations for it. The negotiations for the pact was relaunched in June 2022 after they were suspended in 2013.

Over the last 30 years we have done a lot together. But in truth we have only been scratching the surface of the potential that is there. So, this is not a time to place limits on our cooperation
—Ursula Von der Leyen, European Commission president
India and Europe share a strong partnership built on shared values, innovation and sustainability. Our close collaboration is shaping a better future for our planet. Together, we will work towards a prosperous world
—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

EU President Ursula von der Leyen with PM Narendra Modi ***PHOTO: PTI***

India and the European Union (EU) decided to work on a major security and defence partnership, and explored ways to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific based on global law and respect for sovereignty amid China's military muscle flexing in the region.

Von der Leyen added, "This is not only about stability in our respective regions. But it is also a key part in strengthening our economic security and ultimately prosperity."

They also deliberated on the situation in the Middle-East and war in Ukraine.

India and EU resolved to significantly shore up cooperation in sectors such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, 6G, energy and digital public infrastructure.

India planned to raise concerns about the European Union's controversial carbon tax, which aims to impose tariffs of up to 30 per cent on imports of carbon-intensive goods like steel and aluminium starting next year.

However, no official discussions on the issue have been announced. Meanwhile, an EU official visiting India stated that the bloc would not sign a trade agreement unless India provides "substantial" market access for European-made cars. *—PTI*

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BORDER ROW

Black ink smeared on KSRTC driver for speaking in Kannada

KALABURAGI, 28 FEB

PHOTO: SALAR

Even before the tension caused by an attack on the conductor of a state-run bus for not speaking in Marathi died down, miscreants blackened the face of a Kalyana Karnataka Transport Corporation bus driver belonging to Kalaburagi depot.

Miscreants stopped the bus near Pune Gate in Kalyan district in Maharashtra and demanded that driver Sadiq chant "Jai Maharashtra". They then smeared black ink on his face and wrote "Jai Maharashtra, Jai Marathi" on the bus.

The miscreants also demanded that the Karnataka government apologise unconditionally to Marathis.

Following the incident, Kalyana Karnataka Transport Corporation suspended bus services from Aland to Pune and other destinations in the neighbouring state.

Earlier in the week, a bus conductor from Bale Koundri, Belagavi, was attacked for not conversing with a passenger in Marathi. In another incident, a bus conductor Basavaraj Huggar and driver and driver Shivappa were attacked by a duo on a bike near Malanur village in Hunsagi taluk.

Kannada outfits announce bandh on 22 March

Meanwhile, Kannada Okkuta, an umbrella organisation for several pro-Kannada outfits, on Friday called for a statewide shutdown in Karnataka on 22 March, condemning the alleged assault on a KSRTC bus conductor for not speaking in Marathi in border district of Belagavi. *—Salar News*

Indian army personnel during a rescue effort following an avalanche that struck a camp near Mana village, Uttarakhand ***PHOTO: PTI***

Avalanche buries BRO camp in Uttarakhand: 32 rescued, 25 trapped

DEHRADUN, 28 FEB

- Rescue operations were stopped in view of continuing bad weather and the impending danger of more avalanches in Mana. Two mild avalanches had followed the main one

Thirty-two of the 57 BRO workers trapped under an avalanche in the high-altitude village of Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district have been rescued, concern over the safety of the other 25 mounting as night fell on the snowbound slopes and rescue efforts came to a temporary halt.

The snowslide, which buried a Border Roads Organisation camp between Mana and Badrinath, rolled down early on Friday morning. Multiple teams battled through tough terrain, heavy snow and icy temperatures through the day to reach the men. They initially pulled out 10 workers and then the others, sources said.

Four of those rescued are reported to be in a critical condition, the Army PRO said. All 32 have been taken to the ITBP camp in Mana for treatment, the sources said.

Visuals from Mana showed rescuers trudging through high piles of snow in a grim landscape bathed in white.

Rescue operations were stopped in view of continuing bad weather and the impending danger of more avalanches in Mana. Two mild avalanches had followed the main one.

Teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and SDRF left for the spot, about 300 km from the state capital Dehradun, amid continuing snowfall and rain.

Home Minister Amit Shah said rescuing the trapped people is the government's priority. In a post on X, he said he had talked to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and the DGs of the ITBP and the NDRF. *—PTI*

DEAL TO END WAR?

Zelenskyy seeks security, Trump backtracks on 'dictator' remark

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with US President Donald Trump, at White House, on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is meeting with President Donald Trump on Friday at a pivotal moment for his country, as he tries to persuade the White House to provide some form of US backing for Ukraine's security against any future Russian aggression.

Zelenskyy flashed a thumb's up but didn't speak to reporters as he arrived at the White House. He wore a more formal black top rather than his usual military green T-shirt, prompting Trump to quip, "He's all dressed up."

Zelenskyy's delegation is expected to sign a landmark economic agreement with the US aimed at financing the reconstruction of war-damaged Ukraine, a deal that would closely tie the two countries together for years to come.

The deal, which is seen as a step toward ending the three-year war, references the importance of Ukraine's security. But it leaves that to a separate agreement to be discussed between the two leaders — talks that are likely to commence Friday.

According to the preliminary economic agreement, seen by The Associated Press, the US and Ukraine will establish a co-owned, jointly managed investment fund to which Ukraine will contribute 50 per cent of future revenues from natural resources, including minerals, hydrocarbons and other extractable materials.

A more detailed agreement on establishing the fund will be drawn up once the preliminary one is signed.

This is Zelenskyy's fifth White House visit, but his previous four came during the Biden administration. The Ukrainian president also was meeting with US senators during his time in Washington. *—PTI*

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DRUNK TEEN ACCUSED

MP: 5-yr-old gets 28 stitches after rape

SHIVPURI/GWALIOR, 28 FEB

A 5-year-old girl in Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh is battling for her life after being raped brutally by an inebriated teen boy, the ordeal leaving her with grievous injuries on her private parts, scratch and bite marks on the face and 28 stitches to close the wounds.

The horrific incident took place amid a marriage function on 22 February when the 17-year-old accused, who has been arrested, took her to an isolated house and raped her, Additional Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Mule said on Friday.

"The victim's family found her unconscious in the house with blood stains as well as scratch and bite marks on the face. She was given tial treatment at local government hospital before being shifted to Gwalior for specialised care," Mule said underlining the brutality of the child's ordeal.

"The girl arrived in a very bad state, She has suffered grievous injuries in her anal area, which was reconstructed by a team of doctors. She had a very dangerous tear between her legs, deep wounds on her jaw and head. She required 28 stitches to close the wounds.

In a message on X, Scindia said he had spoken to the victim's kin on phone. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Autorickshaw crushed between buses, 2 killed

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

An auto-rickshaw driver and a passenger were crushed to death after their vehicle was crushed between two BMTC buses on Friday afternoon.

The incident took place around 12.10pm near Seetha Circle under the jurisdiction of Banashankari Traffic Police Station. The deceased have been identified as auto driver Vijay Kumar, 50, and passenger **Vishnu Bhat (in pic)**, 70.

Police said a BMTC bus moving in front of the autorickshaw came to a sudden halt. Unable to stop in time, the autorickshaw rammed into the bus. Meanwhile, another BMTC bus approaching from behind rammed into the auto, crushing it between the two buses.

Banashankari Traffic Police conducted the preliminary investigation and shifted the bodies to the hospital for post-mortem. They have registered a case and are investigating if there was any negligence on the part of the BMTC drivers.

The incident created a traffic blockade near Hosakerehalli Cross for a brief period. However, police personnel swiftly cleared the jam. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

Brother stabs man to death over property dispute

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

A man was killed by his younger brother within the Bommanahalli police station limits on Friday morning. According to the police, the incident stemmed from a property dispute between the two. The deceased, Srikanth, 36, was a resident of Nadamma Layout. A manhunt has been launched for his younger brother, Nagendra, 30, who fled after the attack. Around 11am, an argument between the brothers over their long-standing property dispute escalated into a physical altercation. In a fit of rage, Nagendra allegedly grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed Srikanth. Family members and neighbours rushed Srikanth to a nearby hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries. *—Salar News*

Pourakarmikas threaten to protest in Mysuru

MYSURU, 28 FEB

Mysuru City Corporation Permanent and Contractual Pourakarmikas Federation President N Mara on Friday urged the state government to regularise the services of 24,000 pourakarmikas working on contractual or outsourcing basis in various corporations and municipalities across the state. He also urged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to include this in the State budget. Mara said 48,000 pourakarmikas have been working in various corporations, municipalities and other urban local bodies, but in previous year, the State government regularised the services of 24,000 of them under the direct recruitment scheme. He said the government should consider doing the same with the rest of the pourakarmikas this year. *—Salar News*

Akasa Air launches daily Abu Dhabi flights

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

Akasa Air on Friday announced the launch of daily direct flights connecting Abu Dhabi with Bengaluru and Ahmedabad under a codeshare agreement with Etihad Airways, boosting travel between India and the UAE. The maiden flight from Bengaluru will depart from Kempegowda International Airport at 10.00am IST on 1 March, arriving at Zayed International Airport in Abu Dhabi at 12.35pm AST, the airline said. "The inaugural flight from Ahmedabad will depart from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at 10.45pm IST on 1 March, arriving at Zayed International Airport in Abu Dhabi at 1am AST on 2 March," the airline stated. *—PTI*

Drugs worth ₹90L seized, 10 held in seperate incidents

BENGALURU,28 FEB

Bengaluru police seized narcotics worth over Rs 90 lakh and arrested 10 people in separate cases across the city on Friday. In the first case, Adugodi police arrested a foreign national near Bannerghatta Road for allegedly supplying drugs. Further interrogation led to the arrest of two more suspects, including another foreign national. In separate operations, police arrested seven more suspects linked to drug peddling and seized narcotics worth Rs 11.22 lakh. Meanwhile, KR Puram police arrested a notorious vehicle thief, identified as Prasad Babu from Bangarupalyam, Andhra Pradesh, who was involved in a theft of over 100 two-wheelers in three years. Police recovered 20 Royal Enfield, 30 Pulsar, 40 Activa, among other vehicles, valued at Rs 1.45 crore. Further investigations are underway. *—Salar News*

Amid idli row, govt orders statewide food safety drive

In Jan-Feb, officials tested 3,608 samples; 23 were unsafe

BENGALURU 28 FEB

Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said on Friday that Karnataka Food Safety and Drug Administration Department has intensified its enforcement measures to enhance food safety and public health across the State, "The department has stepped up inspections, sample collections, and enforcement actions targeting unsafe food practices, misuse of drugs, and unregulated cosmetic products," Rao said at Arogya Soudha, highlighting the ongoing crackdown.

In January and February, officials tested 3,608 food samples, with 23 found unsafe due to harmful artificial colours, preservatives, and plastic sheets used in food preparation and packaging. "Cases have been booked against the violators," he added.

The department has also launched a special campaign in February to assess the quality of bottled drinking water, collecting 288 samples for analysis. The results are awaited.

Districts	Restaurants/ Hotels	Notices issued*
B'luru Urban	111	12
BBMP East	25	5
BBMP South	7	2
BBMP North	20	0
BBMP West	62	1

*Notices issued to eateries using plastics to make idlis

Crackdown on substandard medicines

He also highlighted stricter monitoring of pharmaceuticals, noting that 1,133 drug samples were collected last year, of which 106 were substandard. In February alone, 1,841 samples were tested, with 58 found below standard. A special drive led to the recall of substandard drugs worth around Rs 17 lakh.

"Once substandard drugs enter the market, tracing and removing them becomes challenging, but we are actively identifying and recalling such products," Rao said. In parallel, inspections at 488 medical shops for misuse of narcotic and psychotropic substances led to 400 showcause notices, 231 licence suspensions, and three cancellations. Another drive uncovered 52 shops selling antibiotics without valid prescriptions.

Unsafe tattoo inks and artificial colours

Meanwhile, tattoo ink samples tested positive for 22 heavy metals, including arsenic and chromium. With no existing standards, the Food Safety Commissioner Srinivas K has urged the Centre to regulate tattoo ink under Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) norms.

Rao also flagged unsafe artificial colouring in cakes and green peas, revealing that only five out of 31 green pea samples tested so far were found safe. "Vendors are using harmful colours to make peas appear greener, posing serious health risks," he warned.

Inspections at 681 eateries found 52 establishments using plastic sheets to steam idlis. *—Salar News*

Court issues summons to BSY in POCSO case

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

A special court here on Friday issued summons to veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa and three other accused in connection with a POCSO Act case to appear before it on 15 March.

The court which handles cases booked under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act took fresh cognisance of a chargesheet filed by the Karnataka Criminal Investigation Department (CID) against 82-year-old Yediyurappa. High Court on 7 February had directed the special court to consider afresh and pass appropriate orders on the CID's final report in the case. The court had issued this order while partly allowing the petition filed by Yediyurappa challenging proceedings against him under the POCSO Act, and remitting back to the trial court the criminal case registered against him. It had also granted anticipatory bail to him.

BS Yediyurappa *PHOTO: PTI*

The case was registered on 14 March last year based on a complaint lodged by the mother of a 17-year-old girl who alleged that Yediyurappa sexually assaulted her daughter during a meeting on 2 February, at his residence in Dollars Colony here. The CID on 27 June filed a chargesheet which had alleged that Yediyurappa and three other accused paid money to the complainant and her minor daughter "to buy their silence".

The 54-year-old complainant died at a private hospital here in May last year, due to lung cancer. *—PTI*

2nd PU exams begin today amid stringent measures

BENGALURU/MYSURU, 28 FEB

With the second Pre-University (PU) examinations for the academic year 2024-25 beginning from 1 March, elaborate arrangements have been made by the Karnataka School Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB) to ensure smooth and fair conduct of the exams. The examinations will continue till 20 March.

A total of 7,13,812 students have registered for the xams, including 6,61,474 fresh candidates, 34,071 repeaters, and 18,317 private candidates. The exams will be held at 1,171 centres across the state.

To prevent malpractice, webcasting will be implemented at all exam centres, with district-level officials monitoring the proceedings in real time. Webcasting is the live streaming of exams over the internet. Additionally, a 200m radius around all centres have been declared a prohibited zone, where photocopy shops, cyber cafes, and computer centres will remain closed during exam hours. Strict action will be taken under the Education Act against those found attempting to leak question papers or encourage malpractice. This year, 2,91,959 students from the science stream, 2,29,308 from commerce, and 1,92,595 from the arts stream have registered, as per the KSEAB.

Meanwhile, Mysuru Deputy Commissioner G Lakshmikanth Reddy asked the officials to ensure that the Second PU and SSLC exams are conducted without any hiccups. *—Salar News*

Teachers check preparations on the eve of the 2nd PU examinations at Sheshadripuram College in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Opposition leader in Assembly R Ashoka, CM Siddaramaiah and BJP State President BY Vijayendra ahead of the Budget session at CM's residence Cauvery, in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: SALAR*

BJP demands more funds for City this Budget

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

- Relook into the Metro fare hike, allocation of funds for constituencies represented by first time MLAs, and holding of BBMP polls at the earliest are among the issues highlighted

A delegation of BJP legislators and MPs from Bengaluru on Friday met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and sought higher allocation of funds in the upcoming State budget for the City's development.

The delegation led by party State BJP President BY Vijayendra and Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R Ashoka asked for allocation of Rs 150 crore for each Assembly segment in the city.

Relook into the Metro fare hike, allocation of funds for constituencies represented by first time MLAs, and holding of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) polls at the earliest are among the issues that were highlighted at the meeting. Siddaramaiah who also holds the finance portfolio is scheduled to present the budget for 2025-26 on 7 March, marking his 16th budget.

Speaking to reporters here after meeting the Siddaramaiah, Vijayendra said, when BJP's B S Yediyurappa and Basavarj Bommai were Chief Ministers earlier Rs 6,000-8,000 crores were given to BBMP for the development of Bengaluru in every budget. Noting that infrastructure projects like flyovers and others are going on at a slow pace, the state BJP chief said, priority should be given for completion of such projects by allocating more funds for them.

He said, during the meeting, Bengaluru MPs PC Mohan and Tejasvi Surya suggested that the Chief Minister send necessary communication to the fare fixation committee to reduce the metro fare that was hiked recently. Vijayendra said the party will also raise the issue of an "unscientific" tunnel road that has been planned in the City. *—PTI*

FEST AT VIDHANA SOUDHA

Visitors at the Karnataka Legislative Assembly Book Fair at Vidhana Soudha premises in Bengaluru on Friday. The first-ever book and cultural festival hosted by the Karnataka Legislative Assembly will run till 3 March *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

ISRO to resume SpaDeX experiments from March

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

The ISRO will resume experiments on the SpaDeX mission in mid-March by trying to separate the two satellites – Chaser and Target – and re-dock them again as it attempts to master the technologies for future projects.

The mission was launched on 30 December last year when it placed in orbit two satellites – SDX01 and SDX02 – to demonstrate the docking experiment in space. After several attempts, ISRO successfully docked the two satellites on 16 January. "The unified satellite is in an elliptical orbit. So, we get a 10-15 days window once in two months to conduct various experiments," ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said on the sidelines of the National Science Day celebrations. He said the window for carrying out experiments on the SpaDeX satellites will be available from 15 March. "Right now, we are doing simulation experiments for separation of satellites and re-docking them. We have a plan and will start experiments in March," Narayanan said. *—PTI*

1ST CASES THIS YEAR

Bird flu cases detected in Raichur, Chikkaballapur and Ballari

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

After cases of bird flu were detected in Ballari, Chikkaballapur and Raichur, the Health Department has stepped up its surveillance across the State, officials said on Friday.

Cases of bird flu (H5N1 avian influenza), among poultry birds have been reported in Manvi taluk of Raichur, Chikkaballapur taluk of Chikkaballapur and Sandur taluk of Ballari, they said.

However, no cases of bird flu in humans have been reported in the state so far, official said.

Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services department collected samples of dead poultry birds and sent them to Central Laboratory in Bhopal where it was confirmed that those birds died due to bird flu, a senior official from the health department said. As part of precautionary measures, the Animal Husbandry department has initiated culling within 3 km radius of the place where cases of bird flu have been detected. Chikkaballapur Deputy Director of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Biological Rangappa aid the department has decided to to cull all the 447 poultry birds in the Varadahalli village. Amid resistance from the villagers, the authorities convinced them that if the infected birds are consumed it can cause danger to human lives.

Urging public to not panic, a senior health department official assured that all preventive measures are being taken by the respective district authorities in coordination with Health and Animal Husbandry departments of the state. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

BJP loses Gadag & Betageri municipal corporation to Cong

GADAG, 28 FEB

BJP has lost power in the Gadag-Betageri municipal corporation following the recent presidential election, held on Friday. BJP's count of representatives fell from 18 to 15 after the dismissal of three members amid allegations of misconduct, allowing the Congress party to secure a majority with 17 members in the 35-member council.

BJP opted to boycott the elections, resulting in Congress candidates Krishna Parapur and Shakuntala Akki being elected unopposed as president and vice president of the corporation, respectively.

The dismissed members—Usha Dadar, Anil Abbigeri and Gulappa Mushageri—faced serious allegations related to the creation of fake documents. *—Salar News*

Leopard rescued from Mysuru RBI unit premises

MYSURU, 28 FEB

A four-year-old leopard walked straight into a cattle pen trap set up on the premises of the Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited (BRBNMPL), the RBI's currency note printing press, in North Mysuru early on Friday.

After the big cat was spotted on campus in Metagalli in the city, the forest department officials placed a cattle pen and four cages at strategic locations on the premises.

After it received a complaint from the BRBNMPL management 20 days ago, the department had deputed more than 30 staffers, including a leopard task force, on the operation.

PHOTO: SALAR

The forest department team, which rescued the wild cat, released it into the forest, said chief conservator of forests, Mysuru circle. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

CM Fadnavis' office gets bomb threat from Pak number

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

Mumbai Traffic Police on Friday received a message from a Pakistani number, threatening to attack Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, officials said. According to Mumbai Police, the person introduced himself as Malik Shahbaz Humayun Raza. Following the threat, the Worli Police registered a case and launched an investigation. Further investigation is underway. Earlier on 21 February, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde also received a death threat. *—ANI*

Chhattisgarh Cong MLAs suspended from Assembly

RAIPUR, 28 FEB

Congress legislators were suspended briefly from the Chhattisgarh legislative assembly on Friday after they raised slogans accusing the BJP-led state government of intimidating the Opposition using Central agencies. The proceedings of the House were first adjourned for 10 minutes, following which the Congress MLAs trooped into the well and raised slogans against the government. Congress legislators disrupted the Question Hour and alleged that Central agencies are being misused to intimidate the Opposition. This led to an uproar in the House, and Speaker Raman Singh had to adjourn the proceedings for 10 minutes. Congress members walked out of the House after the Speaker announced their suspension, and they boycotted the proceedings for the day. The Speaker later revoked their suspension. *—PTI*

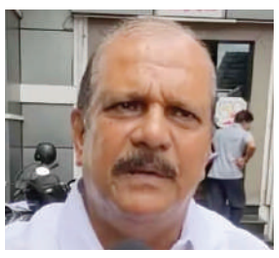


PHOTO: ANI

BJP's PC George gets bail in hate speech case

KOTTAYAM, 28 FEB

BJP leader PC George was on Friday granted bail by a court in this district in a hate speech case. A magisterial court in Erattupetta granted bail to George who had surrendered before it on Monday and was remanded to police custody on the same day. He had surrendered before the court after the Kerala High Court rejected his anticipatory bail plea. Dismissing his petition, the High Court had observed that granting bail in such a case would send the wrong message to society. George, a former MLA, was accused of delivering a hate speech against a minority community during a TV channel discussion. *—PTI*

HC: Last chance for Gokhale to reply to contempt plea

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Delhi High Court on Friday granted a last opportunity to TMC leader Saket Gokhale to respond to a contempt plea filed by former diplomat Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri. Justice Dharmesh Sharma gave two more weeks to Gokhale to file his reply to the contempt petition and posted the hearing on 18April. The court said if Gokhale failed to respond, he could be asked to appear in court. Puri approached the high court in 2021, alleging Gokhale tarnished her goodwill and reputation by making reckless and false allegations about her financial affairs in the context of an apartment that she owned in Geneva. On 1 July, 2024, the high court restrained the TMC MP from publishing any more content on social media or electronic platforms. *—PTI*

Rigid 2 language policy deprives youth: TN Guv

DMK slams Ravi for 'spewing hatred'; Law Minister tells Guv not to lecture Tamils on 'language love'

CHENNAI, 28 FEB

Wading into the language row in Tamil Nadu, state Governor RN Ravi on Friday said the "rigid" two language policy of the state government has deprived youth in the southern parts of TN of opportunities.

Southern TN has become a "neglected backyard" and this was "unfair," he said.

The ruling DMK hit out at Ravi over his comments, accusing him of "spewing hatred" against Tamil Nadu.

The Governor, who is touring the southern Tuticorin and Tirunelveli districts, took to 'X' to inform about an interaction he had with representatives from various fields, including those from education, business, health, hospitality, youth startups, women entrepreneurs, MSME sectors besides students.

He said that it was encouraging to see their positive energy and enterprise transforming lives for the better despite "numerous difficulties and systemic obstacles."

Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi PHOTO: PTI

Responding, Law Minister S Regupathy asked Ravi to "not impart lessons to Tamils about their language affinity."

The Governor was "repeatedly spewing hatred against Tamil, Tamil Nadu and Tamil Thaai Vazhthu (the state anthem)," he said in an apparent reference to past controversies.

"Unable to stand the strides made by Tamil Nadu in economy and education, Governor Ravi has been spewing hatred against the state," the senior DMK leader charged in a party statement.

- The ruling DMK has been alleging Hindi imposition by the Centre through the 3-language formula as part of the NEP, a charged denied by the union government

He asked if Ravi can specify in which sector was south Tamil Nadu lagging behind and claimed TN has made "uncomparable" strides in education, medicine and economy, against other Indian states. This was evident from the data released by the Central government, Regupathy added.

The ruling DMK has been alleging Hindi imposition by the Centre through the 3-language formula as part of the NEP, a charged denied by the union government. *—PTI*

Stalin: Don't link seats to population & penalise TN

CHENNAI, 28 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin called upon the Centre not to 'penalise' the southern states by determining the parliamentary constituencies based on population alone and warned such an attempt will be resisted.

"Our demand is clear - don't determine parliamentary constituencies based on population alone. Do not penalise the southern states that took responsible measures to control population growth," Stalin, who is president of DMK, said.

If such an 'injustice' was enforced, then TamilNadu and the DMK would never accept it, he stressed in his message on eve of his 72nd birthday.

Meanwhile, actor and Makkal Needhi Maiam founder Kamal Haasan on Friday met Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and praised him for his stand against the three-language policy, saying that the leader has emerged as a bulwark to protect the state.

"At a time when the people of Tamil Nadu, the Tamil language, and Tamil culture are facing various pressures, Stalin, like his predecessors, has emerged as a bulwark to protect Tamil Nadu." *—PTI/ANI*

PROMOTING GLOBAL STABILITY

India, EU to boost ties in high-tech, energy & trade

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) on Friday resolved to significantly shore up cooperation in sectors such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, 6G, clean energy and digital public infrastructure (DPI).

The two sides deliberated on new opportunities in these sectors at the second ministerial meeting of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), held on the margins of European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen's visit to India.

PHOTO: PTI

The Indian team at the meeting comprised External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. Technology Commissioner Henna Virkkunen, Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic and Innovation Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva represented the EU.

Following the meeting, the two sides said they have a common interest in promoting global stability, economic security, and sustainable and inclusive growth in response to the shifting dynamics of the global geopolitical landscape.

Both sides are committed to leverage their respective strengths to accelerate a human-centric digital transformation and the development of advanced and trustworthy digital technologies such as AI, semiconductors and 6G, it said.

In the talks, India and the EU also agreed to promote collaboration in the field of semiconductors.

India and EU also reaffirmed their resolve to put in place a safe, secure, trustworthy, human-centric and responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) eco-system. *—PTI*

Hospitals without ICUs, no loos in Delhi's Mohalla clinics: CAG report

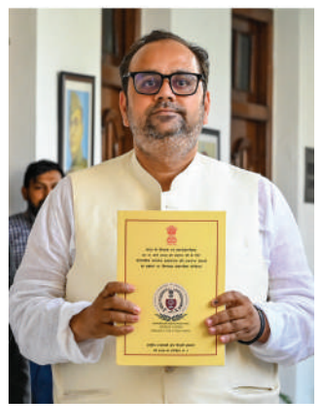
NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Delhi's health infrastructure grappled with staff crunch, lack of adequate medicines and equipment, and unspent funds, revealed a CAG report tabled in the assembly on Friday that also painted a poor picture of the previous AAP dispensation's flagship Mohalla Clinic project.

It said a review of 74 Mohalla Clinics found none had the full stock of all 165 essential medicines. The CAG report also highlighted the lack of essential equipment such as pulse oximeters, glucometers, X-ray viewers, thermometers and blood pressure monitors at these facilities.

This is the second CAG report which has been tabled in the House. A report on the Delhi liquor policy was tabled in the assembly last Tuesday. Twelve reports on the previous Aam Aadmi Party government's performance are to be tabled by the Rekha Gupta-led BJP dispensation.

The CAG report on the state of the city's health infrastructure said that around 70 per cent of the patients visiting Mohalla Clinics between October 2022 and March 2023 spent less than a minute with the doctor.



Pankaj Kumar Singh shows a copy of CAG report PHOTO: PTI

It found that 41 of the 218 Mohalla Clinics in four selected districts of Delhi remained closed for periods ranging from 15 days to nearly two years due to doctors resigning, leaving or being on leave.

The report also said "financial mismanagement" further compounded the crisis, with Rs 510.71 crore under the National Health Mission left unutilised. *—PTI*

Atishi: AAP MLAs' suspension 'blow to democracy'

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

A significant political confrontation has erupted in the Delhi Assembly following the suspension of 21 Opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs, including Leader of Opposition Atishi. Atishi condemned the suspensions as an "insult to the people's mandate," while Speaker Vijender Gupta defended the decision, citing parliamentary rules and previous disruptions.

The situation escalated when the suspended MLAs were prevented from entering the Assembly grounds the following day while attempting to stage a protest at the Mahatma Gandhi statue. Atishi described this move as "unprecedented".

Gupta, however, firmly rejected accusations of bias, asserting that the suspensions adhered to Assembly Rule 277. *—PTI*

Gunfire at Meitei holy site in Manipur

IMPHAL, 28 FEB

In the conflict-ridden state of Manipur, unidentified militants opened fire at a Meitei religious site, Kongba Maru, in Imphal East district on Friday morning. Fortunately, no casualties were reported as the incident occurred around 9.30am while devotees were present under heavy security.

Authorities confirmed that seven rounds were fired from the adjoining hills, prompting additional security forces to be deployed to the area. Following the gunfire, local residents protested by blocking vehicular traffic, voicing their anger over escalating violence. The site previously experienced vandalism by individuals allegedly linked to hill areas.

Ajay Kumar Bhalla PHOTO: PTI

This incident coincided with Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla's extension of the deadline for the surrender of illegal firearms until 4 pm on 6 March, following public demands for more time. More than 300 firearms have already been surrendered during the initial seven-day period aimed at reducing violence. Since May 2023, over 250 individuals have lost their lives due to ethnic conflicts between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, prompting the Central government to impose President's rule on 13 February after Chief Minister N Biren Singh's resignation.

Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Amit Shah will on Saturday review the security situation in Manipur, the first such meeting after the imposition of the President's rule in the northeastern state, officials said. *—PTI*

Surrender illegal arms by 6 March: Guv

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Friday extended the deadline for the surrender of looted and illegal arms until 4pm on 6 March following demands by people from both hill and valley areas for additional time, an official statement said. *—PTI*

India questions secrecy over UNSC listing rejections

UNITED NATIONS, 28 FEB

India has urged for immediate reforms within the UN Security Council (UNSC), emphasising the need for greater transparency in its subsidiary bodies. India's Permanent Representative at the UN, Ambassador P. Harish, expressed concerns during the Inter-Governmental Negotiations Plenary, referring to the lack of public information regarding the rejection or delay of requests to blacklist terrorist entities as a "disguised veto".

Harish highlighted that while the outcomes of listing decisions are public, the rationale for blocking listings remains obscured, concentrated in the hands of a select few. He lamented the absence of progress in reform initiatives despite widespread acknowledgment among member states of their necessity.

"The demand for reforms in this Chamber is loud and clear," Harish stated, underlining that immediate action was required to restore faith in the UN's capacity to manage pressing global issues, particularly concerning peace and security.

Additionally, he called for a holistic approach to reform, stressing that piecemeal efforts would prove ineffective. "Reforms pertaining to one cluster cannot be considered in isolation," he asserted. *—PTI*

AMID MONEY CRUNCH

Himachal govt seeks funds from temples, BJP dubs it 'attack'

SHIMLA, 28 FEB

Amid a severe financial crunch triggered by landslides and flash floods, the Himachal Pradesh government has requested contributions from temple trusts to support welfare schemes. This move has sparked controversy, with the opposition BJP strongly criticising the decision as an attack on religious sentiments.

A notification issued on January 29 by the Social Justice and Empowerment Department sought funds for the Mukhya Mantri Sukh Ashray and Mukhya Mantri Sukh Shiksha Yojana, welfare schemes launched in February 2023 and September 2024.

The government emphasised that contributions would be voluntary and require approval from temple trusts, in compliance with the Himachal Pradesh Hindu Public Religious Institutions Charitable Endowment Act.

Sukhvinder Singh Sukh PHOTO: X

The BJP accused the ruling Congress of misusing temple funds for regular government expenses. Former Chief Minister Jairam Thakur condemned the move, stating, "No past government has ever used temple trust funds for budgetary schemes... this is shocking and unacceptable." Thakur also alleged that the Congress administration was targeting temples after making adverse remarks about 'sanatan dharma'.

In response, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu and Revenue Minister Jagat Singh Negi defended the initiative, clarifying that donations were sought from the public at large and not just temples.

They emphasised the funds would support education and welfare of underprivileged children.

The Congress government is facing a financial crisis, which led to deferred salaries and allowances for state officials last year. The ongoing controversy reflects the growing political tension in Himachal Pradesh over the use of religious funds for public welfare. *—Agencies*

Andhra govt tables Rs 3.22 lakh cr Budget

AMARAVATI, 28 FEB

The Andhra Pradesh budget for the fiscal year 2025-26, presented on Friday by the TDP-led NDA government, focuses heavily on welfare initiatives, including an annual financial support of Rs 20,000 for farmers, increased aid for fishermen during fishing bans, and Rs 15,000 for schoolchildren under the "Talliki Vandanam" scheme.

Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav unveiled a Rs 3.22 lakh crore budget, allocating Rs 20,281 crore for Scheduled Castes, Rs 8,159 crore for Scheduled Tribes, Rs 47,456 crore for Backward Classes, and Rs 5,434 crore for minority communities.

The "Talliki Vandanam" scheme, part of the ruling coalition's "Super Six" promises made for the upcoming 2024 Assembly polls, aims to support children from Classes I to XII in both government and private institutions.

Payyavula Keshav PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

The "Super Six" initiatives also include Rs 1,500 monthly assistance for women aged 19 to 59, creation of 20 lakh jobs, and three free gas cylinders per household.

Keshav further announced plans for comprehensive health insurance of Rs 25 lakh per family in the next fiscal year, amidst a projected revenue deficit of Rs. 33,185 crore and a fiscal deficit of Rs 79,926 crore.

Major allocations include Rs 31,805 crore for school education, Rs 19,264 crore for health services, and Rs 13,600 crore for energy development. *—PTI*

BIHAR ASSEMBLY BUDGET SESSION BEGINS

PATNA, 28 FEB

Bihar Governor Arif Mohammad Khan asserted that the principles of "rule of law" and "sustained development" have been firmly established in the state since Nitish Kumar's first floor test victory on 24 November 2005. In his customary address to the legislature marking the start of the budget session, he referenced the date multiple times, stating, "The state has been experiencing rule of law and sustained development since 24 November, 2005."

Despite disruptions from protesting CPI(ML) Liberation legislators, who arrived handcuffed to protest the treatment of Indian nationals returned from the US, Khan proceeded to highlight significant advancements in Bihar's law enforcement and education sectors. Police personnel have increased from 42,481 to 110,000, while the number of police stations rose from 841 to 1,380. *—PTI*

Man held for recording women bathing at Kumbh

PRAYAGRAJ, 28 FEB

Police in Prayagraj arrested a man for allegedly recording videos of women bathing and changing clothes during the Maha Kumbh and uploading them on YouTube, officials said. A senior police official said that during the interrogation, the accused allegedly admitted that he filmed the videos to gain social media followers and monetise his content on YouTube. The accused has been identified as Amit Kumar Jha, a resident of the Hooghly district, West Bengal. A case has been registered against him at the Cyber Crime Police Station under sections 296/79 of the BNS and relevant provisions of the IT Act, the official added. *—PTI*

Businessman's son held in Rs 122 cr Coop Bank Fraud

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai Police has apprehended Manohar Arunachalam, 33, the son of Unnathan Arunachalam, a businessman evading capture in a Rs 122 crore embezzlement case linked to the New India Cooperative Bank. This marks the fourth arrest made in the investigation, which previously included bank's ex-general manager Hitesh Mehta and real estate developer Dharmesh Paun. Manohar is accused of assisting his father in fleeing authorities and was reportedly with him during his escape. A lookout circular is in effect for Unnathan, who allegedly received Rs 50 crore from Mehta, with Rs 33 crore deposited in private trusts for profit. Manohar will appear in court later today. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Thousands pay tribute to Odia cinema legend

BHUBANESWAR, 28 FEB

Emotions ran high in Jagannath Vihar as the mortal remains of celebrated Odia actor Uttam Mohanty, 66, were brought home following his passing at a private hospital in New Delhi on Thursday night. Fans, cine artists, and cultural figures gathered at Biju Patnaik International Airport to pay their last respects. A long queue formed at his residence as admirers came to bid farewell. His funeral will take place at the Satya Nagar crematorium with full state honours. Mohanty, who had been suffering from liver ailments, is survived by his wife, actress Aparajita Mohanty, and their son, superstar Babushan Mohanty. He starred in numerous Odia films and received several accolades, including the Jayadev Award and Odisha Living Legend Award. *—PTI*

AgustaWestland: Delhi HC reserves verdict on bail plea

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Delhi High Court reserved its verdict on the bail plea of alleged middleman Christian Michel James in the Rs 3,600-crore AgustaWestland money laundering case in the ED case. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma reserved the verdict after hearing arguments from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the accused counsel. James submitted while the anti-money laundering law has a maximum punishment of seven years, he spent over six years in jail. James was extradited from Dubai in December 2018 and was subsequently arrested by both the CBI and the ED. He is among the three alleged middlemen being probed in the case. The ED chargesheet against James alleged he received Rs 225 crore from AgustaWestland. The Supreme Court had granted bail to him in the CBI case on 18 February. *—PTI*

Request for water, food led to Pune rape accused's arrest

Police used drones, sniffer dogs to track the perpetrator

PUNE, 28 FEB

A request for food and water from a house led to the arrest of the absconding 37-year-old man who allegedly raped a woman inside a bus at Swargate bus station in Pune. The accused, Dattatray Ramdas Gade, was apprehended around midnight from a paddy field following an extensive search operation with the help of drones and sniffer dogs in Shirur tehsil.

Gade, a history-sheeter, fled to his native place in Shirur after allegedly raping a 26-year-old woman inside a state transport bus at Swargate bus station.

The accused had switched off his mobile phone, but the police tracked him down after receiving inel that he had visited a house requesting water.

"The search operation in sugarcane fields with drones and dog squads was stopped at night. However, we received information that Gade had visited a house asking for food," Joint Commissioner of police Ranjan Kumar Sharma said.

Absconding Dattaray Ramdas Gade, a history sheeter was apprehended after the house he requested water from informed the police **PHOTO: PTI**

The family informed the police about the accused's presence in the area, after which he was seen hiding in a paddy field nearby and was apprehended.

Pune police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said, "According to the primary medical report, a ligature mark was found on the accused. It is suspected that he attempted suicide. "

Kumar said the security and safety audit of the Swargate bus depot has concluded. "We have analysed points such as security, doors of buses, dark spots and more. Formal action will be implemented soon."

Gade is named in half a dozen theft, robbery and chain-snatching cases and has been out on bail since 2019.

Meanwhile, Congress and NCP (SP) have demanded that the Maharashtra government implement the Shakti bill, which has provisions for the death penalty for atrocities against children and women.

Former state home minister and NCP (SP) leader Anil Deshmukh said the bill was introduced and passed by the government four years ago but is still pending approval from the Centre.

"The Pune bus rape case has once again raised concerns about women's safety." he said. *—PTI*

US embassy grants visa to family of injured Indian student

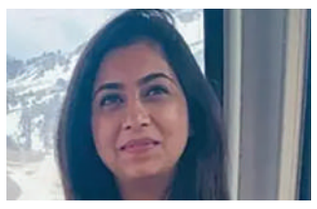
MUMBAI, 28 FEB

The United States consulate granted an emergency visa to the family members of Indian student Neelam Shinde who suffered serious injuries in a road accident in California and is undergoing treatment.

Shinde is still in a coma at a hospital in San Francisco, but her condition has slightly improved, her father said.

A day before, the Ministry of External Affairs had reached out to the US authorities the family's request for an urgent visa.

Tanaji Shinde, Neelam's father, told PTI that they learnt her condition had improved.



Neelam Shinde **PHOTO: INSTAGRAM**

"Neelam is still in a coma, but her condition has improved slightly," he said.

"We went to the embassy in Mumbai today. They interviewed us and granted visa within half an hour. We will leave for the US tomorrow. Both the Union and Maharashtra governments helped us a lot. The media also helped us," Shinde said.

"My daughter is in a coma, we can't do much. I only hope she gets well soon," he added.

Family members were in the process of booking flight tickets, and they will leave for the US as soon as possible, he said. US authorities have not asked them to make any payment yet, and the university where Neelam was studying was also helping to ensure that she received good treatment, he added.

"Her roommates told us that local newspapers there reported that the Nigerian national whose car hit her has been arrested," Kadam said. *—PTI*

MP: 4 students expelled for Holi protests

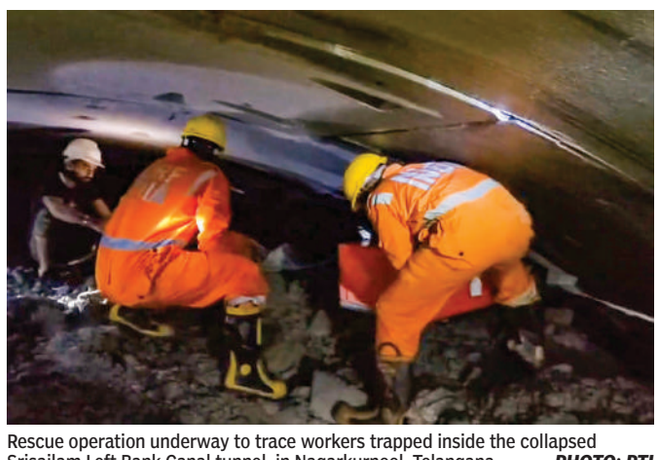
INDORE, 28 FEB

A college in Madhya Pradesh's Indore expelled four student leaders after they were found guilty of holding 150 people, including the female principal and professors, hostage for denial of permission to a Holi programme on the campus.

The incident occurred at the Government Holkar Science College on Monday, when four student leaders led a protest after the college denied permission for Holi celebrations, locking the door of the college's hall from outside and cutting the power supply on 24 February.

The disciplinary committee expelled four student. *—PTI*

Tunnel collapse: SCR joins rescue teams



Rescue operation underway to trace workers trapped inside the collapsed Srisailam Left Bank Canal tunnel, in Nagarkurnool, Telangana **PHOTO: PTI**

NAGARKURNOOL, 28 FEB

South Central Railway joined the rescue teams engaged in locating the eight people who remained trapped in the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel for six days.

Railways has the expertise in cutting heavy metals using equipment such as plasma cutter and Brocho cutting machine, South Central Railway (SCR) Chief Public Relations officer A Sridhar said.

The first batch led by S Murali, Divisional Mechanical Engineer, consisting a senior Section Engineer, 13 Welders and two technicians from Secunderabad have reached the site and have taken up the required works. The second batch of experts also reached the site to support the first team, last night, he further said.

"District Collector, Nagar Kurnool sought the help of South Central Railway in rescue operation by clearing iron and steel debris that have been hindering the rescue works at the site," A Sridhar told PTI.

Meanwhile, Nagarkurnool Superintendent of Police Vaibhav Gaikwad said the metal cutting and debris clearing process has been continuously going on. *—PTI*

Sambhal: Allahabad HC asks ASI to clean Masjid

PRAYAGRAJ, 28 FEB

The Allahabad High Court directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to clean the premises of Jama Masjid in Sambhal but did not pass an order for whitewashing of the mosque.

The order was passed by Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal on an application by Committee of Management, Jama Masjid seeking permission for whitewashing and cleaning of the mosque ahead of Ramzan.

The court asked the ASI to clean the dust and clear the grass on the premises.

According to the ASI report, the interior of the mosque has ceramic paint and there is no need to whitewash at present.

On Thursday, the court directed the ASI to appoint a team of three officers to submit a report. *—PTI*

LANDSLIDES IN HIMACHAL

Heavy snowfall, rains triggered landslides in Himachal Pradesh, leaving key roads blocked **PHOTO: PTI**

UP woman arrested after false gangrape claims

GHAZIABAD, 28 FEB

A woman was arrested in Ghaziabad after her several claims of gangrape were found to be false. Police said the woman had made multiple allegations against her husband, only to later change her statement.

The woman had earlier filed three FIRs on separate occasions against her husband, who is currently in jail based on one such complaint.

In her latest complaint, she claimed that three of his friends kidnapped her and gangraped her, injecting her with a substances and inserting a bottle into her.

The claims were, however, proven false after CCTV footage traced the woman 's activities through the day and investigations found that the chemicals were applied with cotton. *—Agencies*

SINGING A NEW TUNE

Kangana Ranaut, Javed Akhtar settle 4-year defamation case

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

Actor Kangana Ranaut resolved the over four-year-long defamation case filed against her by veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar through mediation, with the BJP MP apologising for the "inconvenience" caused.

The duo appeared before a special court and informed it of their decision to withdraw the complaints they had filed against each other. After the appearance, the actor also posted a photo on her social media platform with Akhtar.

The actor said she made the statement due to misunderstanding and promised not to make such remarks in the future.

Akhtar filed a defatmation complaint against Ranaut in 2020, alleging she damaged his reputation by dragging his name into actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death in an interview.

Ranaut later filed a cross complaint against Akhtar, alleging criminal intimidation and insult to modesty. She claimed that during a meeting at Akhtar's residence in 2016, he criminally intimidated her, demanding she apologise to a co-star.

"Today, Javed and I have resolved our legal matter through mediation. In the mediation Javed has been very kind and gracious, he also agreed to write songs for my next directorial," the BJP MP wrote in the caption. *—PTI*

> **Javed and I have resolved our legal matter through mediation. In the mediation Javed has been very kind and gracious, he also agreed to write songs for my next directorial**
> -Kangana Ranaut

'GROSS IMPROPRIETY'

Apex court slams Chhattisgarh for misusing UAPA

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

The Supreme Court came down heavily on Chhattisgarh Police for booking a man under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) days after the court gave him interim protection from arrest in a murder case.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said the UAPA charge was added by the police with an intent to defeat its 2 January interim bail order.

The bench said, "This hasty action has been taken by the police against the appellant to ensure that he is taken into custody and interim order dated 2 January is nullified."

Terming it as "gross impropriety", the bench deprecated the conduct of the police official and warned him of contempt for an overreach of the court order.

"This is gross impropriety committed by the police officer. We will not hesitate to initiate action for criminal contempt of court. He was aware of orders of this court," the court told the counsel appearing for Chhattisgarh.

The Supreme Court was hearing an appeal filed by Manish Rathore, working as content writer for a news agency, challenging a Chhattisgarh High Court order that denied anticipatory bail in a murder case.

The high court had rejected his plea observing the material collected during investigation showed his involvement in the murder and he had a criminal record. *—PTI*

DELHI STAMPEDE PLEA REFUSED

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Supreme Court refused to entertain a plea that sought directions to be given to authorities on crowd management, claiming that over 200 people had died in a recent stampede at the New Delhi railway station.

"Is there any proof that 200 have died?" a bench of Justices B R Gavai and P K Mishra asked the counsel.

The counsel claimed several videos of the stampede at the railway station were uploaded on X and the Railways has issued notices to witnesses. The bench dismissed the plea and said "Those persons can approach the court."

At least 18 people were killed in the 15 February stampede, according to official records. *—PTI*

'NO ACTION' AGAINST ISHA FOUNDATION

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Supreme Court refused to interfere with the Madras High Court order quashing notices of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board against Jaggi Vasudev's Isha Foundation over construction of buildings in the foothills of Velliangiri mountains without prior environmental clearance.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh said that while no action will be taken, the centre must comply with environmental norms. They clarified that the order will not create precedent for regularising illegal construction and it was taken in particular facts and circumstances of the case. *—PTI*

SC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST RAHIM SINGH RELEASE

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to hear a plea of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) against the repeated temporary release of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. Singh is serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Prashant Kumar Mishra noted Singh's noted the Punjab and Haryana high court saying if an application was made, it would be considered without "arbitrariness or favouritism".

"Challenge that now and file a contempt petition before the high court," the apex court observed. *—PTI*

TCS employee dies by suicide in Agra, blames wife

AGRA, 28 FEB

An IT firm employee, Manav Sharma, died by suicide after live-streaming a video in which he accused his wife, Niketa, of driving him to the drastic step. The incident occurred on 24 February, and an FIR has been filed at Sadar Bazaar Police Station, based on the complaint of Sharma's father, Narendra Kumar Sharma.

The FIR details a history of strained relations between Manav and his wife, claiming daily conflicts and threats of suicide that left him feeling harassed and depressed. Manav, who worked as a manager at TCS in Mumbai, recently returned to Agra from Mumbai with his wife.

According to the complaint, Manav accompanied Niketa to her parents' home, where he was insulted.

He returned home and hung himself around 5.00am on 24 February.

Before taking the extreme step, Manav recorded a video on his mobile phone, blaming his wife for driving him to his death. As the video went viral, Niketa released a counter-video, alleging that Manav was abusive, especially when intoxicated, and had made suicide attempts previously.

Manav's sister later saw the video on his phone, leading to the registration of a case.

Police are investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident after registering a case under Section 108 (Abetment of Suicide) of the BNS.

The case is similar to Bengaluru techie Atul Subhash's suicide last December where a tech firm employee ended his life, leaving behind a video accusing his wife. *—ANI/PTI*

INDONESIA GETS READY

Indonesian Muslims buy vegetables to prepare for the holy month of Ramadan at a market in Jakarta, on Friday
PHOTO: PTI

Ramadan: Month of fasting, reflection & global unity

Observant Muslims the world over will soon be united in a ritual of daily fasting from dawn to sunset as the Islamic holy month of Ramadan starts.

For Muslims, it's a time of increased worship, religious reflection, charity and good deeds. Socially, it often brings families and friends together in festive gatherings around meals to break their fast.

Ramadan is followed by the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

Ramadan's religious rituals and spiritual essence unite diverse Muslim communities around the world. The plights of some fellow Muslims and some issues that have resonance beyond borders — including conflicts and political turmoil — can become part of the focus of the month's prayers, giving or advocacy for many.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar; the month cycles through the seasons.

The start of the month traditionally depends on the sighting of the crescent moon. This year, the first day is expected to be on or around 1 March.

The actual start date may vary among Muslim communities due to declarations by multiple Islamic authorities around the globe on whether the crescent has been sighted or different methodologies used to determine the start of the month.

Fasting is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, along with the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimage.

Muslims see various meanings and lessons in observing the fast.

It's regarded as an act of worship to attain God-conscious piety and one of submission to God. The devout see benefits including practicing self-restraint, growing closer to God, cultivating gratitude and empathising with people who are poor and hungry.

The daily fast in Ramadan includes abstaining from all food and drink – not even a sip of water is allowed – from dawn to sunset before breaking the fast in a meal known as "iftar" in Arabic. Those fasting are expected to also refrain from bad deeds, such as gossiping, and to increase good deeds.

During Ramadan, Muslims hold congregational prayers and dedicate more time for religious contemplation and reading of the Quran
PHOTO: AI

Muslims typically stream into mosques for congregational prayers and dedicate more time for religious contemplation and the reading of the Quran, the Muslim holy book.

Charity is a hallmark of Ramadan. Among other ways of giving, many seek to provide iftar for those in need, distributing Ramadan boxes filled with pantry staples, handing out warm meals alongside such things as dates and juice or helping hold free communal meals.

Muslims eat a pre-dawn meal, called "suhoor," to hydrate and nurture their bodies ahead of the daily fast.

Yes. There are certain exemptions from fasting, such as for those who are unable to because of illness or travel. Those unable to fast due to being temporarily ill or travelling need to make up for the missed days of fasting later.

In Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, Ramadan is typically a festive time. Colourful lanterns, in different shapes and sizes, dangle from children's hands and adorn homes or the entrances of buildings and stores. Ramadan songs may be played to welcome the month.

A line-up of new television series is another fixture of the month in some countries, and advertisers compete for the attention of viewers.

People in Indonesia's Aceh province slaughter animals during Meugang festivities. The meat is cooked and shared in a communal feast with family, friends, poor people and orphans. Hundreds of residents in Tangerang, a city just outside the capital of Jakarta, flock to the Cisadane River to wash their hair with rice straw shampoo and welcome the fasting month with a symbolic spiritual cleansing.

In India, stalls lining many streets sell such things as dates, sweets and freshly cooked food. At night, some New Delhi neighbourhoods become lively as Muslims head to mosques to attend prayers. Some Indian Muslims also visit Sufi shrines decorated with lights and colourful flowers. In the United States, where Muslims make up a diverse minority, gathering at mosques and Islamic centres when possible for iftar meals and prayers provides many Muslim families with a sense of community. Some Muslims also organise or attend interfaith iftar meals.

Some big US retailers have started catering to Ramadan shoppers, selling such things as Ramadan-themed decor. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Palestinians, Israelis brace for escalation during holy month

Every year during Ramadan, 32-year-old Palestinian journalist Rahma Ali joins thousands of worshipers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during the month-long Muslim holiday. But last year, a few months after the 7 October, 2023, Hamas invasion and amid Israel's subsequent war in Gaza, Ali was denied entry for the first time.

"They saw that I was from Shuafat and said no. That's never happened before," she recalls.

A resident of the Shuafat refugee camp on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Ali says that Ramadan last year was a somber affair: "It was very sad because of the war, especially seeing what was happening in Gaza; nobody was celebrating."

On the eve of Ramadan this year, about a month into Israel's fragile ceasefire with Hamas, Ali says that the holiday will be better.

In recent years, Ramadan has often served as a flashpoint for existing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, sometimes leading to violent escalations, most notably in 2021 during the previous Israel-Hamas war, Operation Guardian of the Walls. With Ramadan likely to begin at sundown on Friday, there is great worry regarding the potential for violence.

Nivine, a Palestinian peace activist from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Shuafat (not to be confused with the Shuafat camp), is very concerned about the rising tensions.

"Last year there were still feelings of hope, but not this year. The economic situation is so bad, the war in the West Bank is still going on, and we have fatigue from all of the deaths we've seen in Gaza. There's anger mixed with a sense of helplessness," says Nivine, who requested that her last name be withheld for her security.

With Israel's ongoing operation in the West Bank, rising settler violence, the economic crisis, and lack of faith in domestic and international leadership for a long-term solution, there is ample tinder to ignite a wider escalation.

Sensitivities regarding the Temple Mount, known as the Haram al-Sharif to Muslims, and specifically the Al-Aqsa Mosque, have historically served as a trigger for violence. Amid concerns over terror threats, Channel 12 reported that Israeli security services including the Shin Bet, Israel Police and the Defence Ministry have recommended limiting access to the Temple Mount during Ramadan to men over the age of 55, women over 50, and children under 12, and that a maximum of 10,000 people be admitted for Friday prayers. The government has yet to approve these measures.

In response, Hamas issued a Telegram statement urging Palestinian Muslims in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as Arab Israelis, to flock to the Temple Mount and resist Israeli attempts to "desecrate and control" the site "by any means."

The Israel Police said via their spokesperson's unit that they are expecting thousands of worshipers and visitors to Jerusalem to visit the Old City, the Temple Mount and other holy sites. They would not comment on planned restrictions on worshipers or concerns about violence but said that "additional reinforcements" would be deployed across the Old City, the Temple Mount, surrounding neighborhoods and routes leading to worship sites, with "special attention… to areas connecting East and West Jerusalem and paths taken by worshippers." Police deployments will be further bolstered on Fridays, particularly during the midday prayer."

Prof Mustafa Abu Sway, a member of the Islamic Waqf council that oversees the administration of Islamic holy sites including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, says that planned restrictions on worshipers constitute "a direct violation of the freedom of worship". But Abu Sway claims that Israel has violated this agreement over the years, including by restricting the number of worshipers, especially — but not exclusively — during Ramadan.

But for Abu Sway, it is the added police presence and potential restrictions on worshipers that are the impetus for, rather than a safeguard against, violence.

For Palestinians, Jerusalem itself is central to fueling wider conflict. "Jerusalem triggers conflict in the West Bank," says Nivine, "not the other way around."

But for Israeli security analysts, violence in the West Bank is just as likely to trigger violence in Jerusalem, especially this year amid Israel's ongoing offensive in the West Bank, known as Operation Iron Wall. *—PTI*

Al Aqsa Mosque compound atop the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City have historically served as a trigger for violence
PHOTO: INSTA/@ FLASH90

Stay nourished and properly hydrated to support your health

Ramadan is one of the most significant months of the Islamic lunar calendar. It marks the time when the Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

Depending on where you live, Ramadan can mean going 12 to 19 hours without eating or drinking anything, including water.

Our research shows choosing balanced, nutrient-dense foods and drinks can result in better wellbeing and greater energy levels than following your usual diet during Ramadan.

●Here's what to consider if you're fasting for Ramadan.

Do you have any health issues?

Healthy Muslims are expected to fast during Ramadan once they have reached puberty.

Frail older adults are exempt from fasting, as are pregnant, breastfeeding and menstruating women. Anyone who cannot participate in fasting can make up for the missed fasting days later.

People with chronic illness or mental health may be exempt if fasting poses a risk to their health. If you suffer from chronic illness, such as diabetes, heart disease or kidney problems, and want to fast, consult your GP first.

Fasting can have severe health consequences for people with certain medical conditions and those who rely on prescription medication. Some medications need to be taken at a specific time (and some with food) to be safe and effective. If you're not drinking enough water during Ramadan, your body might also handle some medications differently: they may not work as well or cause side effects.

●For people who can safely fast, here are five tips to maintain your wellbeing during Ramadan.

Plan ahead

Plan your meals and hydration in advance, to stay on top of your nutritional intake.

Start reducing your caffeine gradually in the week leading to Ramadan, so your body can adjust. This can help prevent or reduce the fasting headaches that many experience at the beginning of Ramadan.

Move your meals gradually towards Suhoor and Iftar times, so your body gets used to the new mealtimes.

Stay hydrated

Staying hydrated is important during Ramadan. Women should aim to drink 2.1 litres of water or fluids (such as coconut water, clear soups, broths or herbal teas) each day. Men should aim for 2.6 litres.

It is important to stay away from processed foods such as cakes, ice cream as they lack essential nutrients
PHOTO: AI

Limit the intake of sugary or artificially sweetened drinks and enjoy fresh fruit juice only in moderation. Sugary drinks cause a rapid increase in blood sugar levels. The body responds by releasing insulin, causing a drop in blood sugar, which can leave you feeling fatigued, irritable and hungry.

Increase your hydration by including water-rich foods, such as cucumbers and watermelon, in your diet.

Get your nutrients early

Before dawn, have a nutrient-rich, slow-digesting meal, along with plenty of water.

Select healthy nutrient-dense food with proteins and fats from lean meats, fish, chickpeas, tofu, nuts and seeds.

Choose whole grain products, a variety of vegetables and fruits, and fermented foods, such as kimchi and pickles, which can support your digestion. When you prepare your meals, consider grilling, steaming or air frying instead of deep frying.

Stay away from processed foods such as cakes, ice cream, chips and chocolates, as they often lack essential nutrients and are high in sugar, salt and fat. Processed foods also tend to be low in fibre and protein, which are crucial for maintaining a feeling of fullness.

Avoid the temptation to overeat in the evening

At sunset, many Muslims come together with family and friends for the fast-breaking evening meal (Iftar). During these occasions, it may be tempting to overindulge in sweets, salty snacks and fatty dishes. Start with something small, such as a date and a glass of water. You may choose to complete the Maghrib prayer before returning for your main meal and more fluids.

Keep moving

Finally, try to include some light exercise into your schedule, to maintain your fitness and muscle mass, and promote sleep.

But avoid heavy workouts, sauna and intensive sports while fasting, as these may increase dehydration, which can increase your risk of feeling faint and falling. *—Courtesy, The Conversation*

Travel ban lifted; Tate brothers return to US

FORT LAUDERDALE, 28 FEB

Influencer brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate, who are charged with human trafficking in Romania, arrived Thursday in the US after authorities lifted travel restrictions on the siblings, who have millions of online followers. They landed in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, around midday. The Tates – who are dual US-British citizens – were arrested in late 2022 and formally indicted last year on charges they participated in a criminal ring that lured women to Romania, where they were sexually exploited. Andrew Tate was also charged with rape. They deny the allegations. In December, a court ruled that the case could not go to trial because of legal and procedural irregularities on the part of the prosecutors. *—PTI*

Pak detects 2 new polio cases, tally reaches 5 this year

ISLAMABAD, 28 FEB

Pakistani authorities have confirmed two new poliovirus cases, one each in Sindh and Punjab provinces, posing a setback to the country's efforts to eradicate the crippling disease, a media report said. The new cases were reported from Qambar district in Sindh and Mandi Bahauddin district in Punjab, bringing the total number of cases this year to five, Geo News reported. According to the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health, this is the third case of the crippling disease in Sindh and the first in Punjab. Last year, a total of 74 cases were reported. Of these, 27 were from Balochistan, 22 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 23 from Sindh, and one each from Punjab and Islamabad. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Rose Girone, last Holocaust survivor, dies at 113

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

Rose Girone, believed to be the oldest living Holocaust survivor and a strong advocate for sharing survivors' stories, has died. She was 113. Her death was confirmed Thursday by the Claims Conference, a New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. "Rose was an example of fortitude but now we are obligated to carry on in her memory," Greg Schneider, Claims Conference executive vice president, said in a statement. "The lessons of the Holocaust must not die with those who endured the suffering." Girone was born on January 13, 1912, in Janow, Poland. Her family moved to Hamburg, Germany, when she was 6, she said in a filmed interview in 1996 with the USC Shoah Foundation. *—PTI*

Japanese fan in trouble for kissing BTS member

SEOUL, 28 FEB

South Korean police said on Friday that they are summoning a Japanese woman for allegedly kissing Jin, a member of the K-pop supergroup BTS, without consent during a free hug event last year. A police officer said the woman has been requested to appear for questioning over an allegation of sexual harassment. The police refused to disclose her identity. The station said it had launched an investigation after receiving a complaint and refused to provide further details because an investigation was under way. Reports said that South Korean police were able to confirm the identity of the woman with the help of Japanese police. The reports said the woman, who is in her 50s, was refusing to appear for questioning. *—PTI*

Zelenskyy eyes US shield against Russia

Ukraine and US presidents meet today, likely to sign deal to reconstruct war-torn country

As Volodymyr Zelenskyy meets President Donald Trump in Washington on Friday, many Ukrainians fear that a hastily negotiated peace with Russia would allow Moscow to rearm for a future invasion **PHOTO: X**

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

Ukraine's leader will meet with President Donald Trump in Washington on Friday at a pivotal moment for his country, one that hinges on whether he can persuade Trump to provide some form of US backing for Ukraine's security against any future Russian aggression.

During his trip to Washington, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's delegation is expected to sign a landmark economic agreement aimed at financing the reconstruction of war-damaged Ukraine, a deal that would closely tie the two countries together for years to come.

Though the deal, which is seen as a step toward ending the three-year war, references the importance of Ukraine's security, it leaves that to a separate agreement to be discussed between the two leaders – talks that are likely to commence on Friday.

As Ukrainian forces hold out against slow but steady advances by Russia's larger and better-equipped army, leaders in Kyiv have pushed to ensure a potential US-brokered peace plan would include guarantees for the country's future security.

Many Ukrainians fear that a hastily negotiated peace – especially one that makes too many concessions to Russian demands – would allow Moscow to rearm and consolidate its forces for a future invasion after current hostilities cease.

According to the preliminary economic agreement, seen by The Associated Press, the US and Ukraine will establish a co-owned, jointly managed investment fund to which Ukraine will contribute 50 per cent of future revenues from natural resources, including minerals, hydrocarbons and other extractable materials.

A more detailed agreement on establishing the fund will be drawn up once the preliminary one is signed. *—PTI*

CHINA VOWS RETALIATION TO 10% TARIFF

BEIJING, 28 FEB

China has warned the United States of "countermeasures" after US President Donald Trump announced he would impose new tariffs on Chinese goods in response to the smuggling of fentanyl.

Trump on Thursday flagged an additional 10 per cent duty on Chinese imports while announcing that his proposed 25 per cent tariffs on Mexican and Canadian goods would go ahead on 4 March.

Trump said on Truth Social that the new tariff, which would come on top of a 10 per cent duty imposed on Chinese goods earlier this month, would be imposed next month in response to the "very high and unacceptable levels" of fentanyl entering the US.

PHOTO: X

Hitting back at Trump's comments on Friday, China's Ministry of Commerce said Chinese laws on drugs were among the strictest in the world and Washington was "shifting the blame and shirking responsibility".

"China urges the US not to repeat its mistakes and to return to the correct path of resolving disputes through dialogue as soon as possible," a ministry statement said.

"If the US insists on proceeding with this course of action, China will take all necessary countermeasures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.

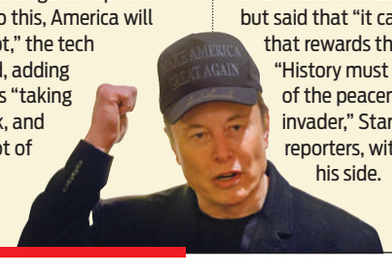
"We have repeatedly stated that unilateral tariffs violate World Trade Organization rules and undermine the multilateral trading system," the statement said. More than 74,000 people have died from synthetic opioid overdoses in the US in 2023. *—PTI*

US fires hundreds of weathermen

Hundreds of weather forecasters and other federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration employees on probationary status were fired Thursday, lawmakers and weather experts said. Federal workers who were not let go said the afternoon layoffs included meteorologists who do crucial local forecasts in National Weather Service offices across the country. *—PTI*

Musk moots raise for politicians

Elon Musk, suggested that members of the US Congress should get salary increases as a way to discourage corruption. "If we don't do this, America will go bankrupt," the tech tycoon said, adding that he was "taking a lot of flak, and getting a lot of death threats." *—Agencies*



Starmer seeks a fair peace deal

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, following talks with Trump on Thursday, applauded his push to end Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but said that "it can't be peace that rewards the aggressor."

"History must be on the side of the peacemaker, not the invader," Starmer told reporters, with Trump by his side. *—PTI*

Judge doubts legality of mass lay-offs

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

Judge William Alsup on Thursday found the mass firings of employees were likely unlawful, granting temporary relief to petitioners against Trump administration's massive dismantling of the federal workforce. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) does not have any authority to hire or fire any employees but its own, Alsup said.

The complaint filed by five labour unions and five nonprofit organisations is among many against the administration's efforts to shrink a workforce that Trump has called bloated and sloppy. Thousands of probationary employees have already been fired, and his administration is now aiming at career officials with civil service protection.

Lawyers for the government agree that the office has no authority to hire or fire employees in other agencies. But they said the OPM asked agencies to review and determine whether employees on probation were fit for continued employment. *—PTI*

Mexico sends 29 drug cartel figures to US

MEXICO CITY, 28 FEB

Mexico has sent 29 drug cartel figures, including drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero, who was behind the killing of a US DEA agent in 1985, to the United States as the Trump administration turns up the pressure on drug trafficking organisations.

Rafael Caro Quintero **PHOTO: CNN**

The unprecedented show of security cooperation comes as top Mexican officials are in Washington trying to head off the Trump administration's threat of imposing 25 per cent tariffs on all Mexican imports starting from Tuesday.

Those sent to the US on Thursday were brought from prisons in Mexico. Among them were members of five Mexican organised crime groups designated earlier this month by US President Donald Trump's administration as "foreign terrorist organizations." *—PTI*

Volunteers help immigrants evade arrest

LOS ANGELES, 28 FEB

Across the US, small groups of people from the Community Self-Defence Coalition, made up of more than 60 organisations, gather in public places. Armed with using walkie-talkies, bullhorns and sirens, they look for officers of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and warn people of their presence to try to prevent arrests.

Counter-ICE operations have had "a huge impact," said John Fabbricatore, a former head of ICE's enforcement and removal division in Denver.

"It's dangerous for the officers because they are trying to get into a situation, maybe undercover, trying to make an arrest without alarming the neighbourhood, and then these guys come out here with these bullhorns and they start yelling and screaming," Fabbricatore said.

Advocates "go right to the edge" of a law against impeding federal law enforcement to avoid criminal prosecution, he said. *—PTI*

Israeli army misjudged Hamas: Report

TEL AVIV, 28 FEB

An investigation by the Israeli military has determined that Hamas was able to carry out the deadliest attack in Israeli history on 7 October, 2023, because the much more powerful Israeli army misjudged the militant group's intentions and underestimated its capabilities.

The findings, released on Thursday, could pressure Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to launch a widely demanded broader inquiry to examine the political decision-making that preceded the attack, which triggered the war in Gaza.

Many Israelis believe the mistakes of 7 October extend beyond the military, and they blame Netanyahu for what they view as a failed strategy of deterrence and containment in the years leading up to the attack. That strategy included allowing Qatar to send suitcases of cash into Gaza and sidelining Hamas' rival, the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority.

Israeli police officers examine the body of a man suspected of ramming his car into a highway bus stop **PHOTO: PTI**

The prime minister has not taken responsibility, saying he will answer questions only after the war has ended.

Despite public pressure, including from the families of the roughly 1,200 people killed in the 7 October attack and the 251 taken as hostages into Gaza, Netanyahu has resisted calls for a commission of inquiry.

The military's main findings were that the region's most powerful and sophisticated military misread Hamas' intentions, underestimated its capabilities and was wholly unprepared for the surprise attack by thousands of heavily armed militants in the early morning hours of a major Jewish holiday.

In comments made to military commanders Monday, and shared with the media on Thursday, the army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, said he took responsibility for the army's failures. *—PTI*

North Korea admits testing cruise missiles

SEOUL, 28 FEB

North Korea said on Friday that it had test-fired strategic cruise missiles to demonstrate its nuclear counter-attack capability, days after it vowed to respond to what it called escalating US-led hostilities since the start of the Trump administration.

North Korea launched two cruise missiles on 26 February **PHOTO: RODONG SINMUN (FEB. 28, 2025)**

The official Korean Central News Agency said the nation's leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the missile tests off the country's west coast on Wednesday. They were the North's fourth missile launch event this year and the second of President Donald Trump's second term.

The launches were designed to inform "the enemies, who are seriously violating our security environment and fostering and escalating the confrontation environment," of the North Korean military's counterattack capability and the readiness of its nuclear operations, KCNA said.

Kim expressed satisfaction over the results of the drills and said the military must be battle-ready and prepared to use its nuclear weapons, the report said. *—PTI*

POPE CROSSED CRUCIAL STAGE: DOCS

ROME, 28 FEB

Pope Francis reached the two-week mark recovery from pneumonia Friday as doctors suggested he had overcome the most critical phase of the infection while holding out on declaring him out of danger entirely.

The Vatican's early Friday update also suggested a level of normalcy and routine as the 88-year-old pope continues recovering at Rome's Gemelli Hospital. "As in past days, the night was tranquil and the pope now is resting."

In their Thursday evening bulletin, doctors said Francis' clinical condition had confirmed that he was improving. For the second day in a row, doctors avoided saying Francis was in critical condition, suggesting "further days of clinical stability are needed". *—PTI*

Hackman death cause eludes cops

SANTA FE, 28 FEB

Oscar-winner Gene Hackman, his wife and one of their dogs were apparently dead for some time before a maintenance worker found their bodies at the couple's home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on Wednesday, investigators said.

Denise Avila at Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office said there was no indication they had been shot or had any wounds that would indicate foul play. But detectives noted that the deaths were "suspicious enough in nature to require a thorough search and investigation".

Gene Hackman **PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**

Hackman, 95, was in an entryway and his 65-year-old wife Betsy Arakawa was lying on her right side in the bathroom. A space heater was next to her head and may have fallen when she abruptly dropped to the floor, according to the affidavit. The New Mexico Gas Company tested the gas lines in and around the home. It didn't find any signs of problems and the Fire Department found no signs of a carbon monoxide leak or poisoning. *—PTI*

6.1 magnitude quake strikes Nepal, 4 injured

KATHMANDU, 28 FEB

At least four people were injured in Kathmandu and elsewhere in a strong earthquake in the neighbouring Sindhupalchowk district on Friday.

The quake measuring 6.1 magnitude was recorded at 2.51 am with its epicentre at Bhairabkunda, Sindhupalchowk district, 65 km east of Kathmandu, said the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre. Some houses in the district developed cracks.

Besides Kathmandu valley, the quake was also felt by people in southern and eastern Nepal, according to officials.

The earthquake prompted many people in Kathmandu and nearby areas to come out of their houses in panic. Two people were injured in Kathmandu while an inmate of Chautara prison was injured as he tried to escape following the earthquake. *—PTI*

'LIFTING THE VEIL'

Newly released Jeffrey Epstein contact list includes Michael Jackson, Alec Baldwin

NEW YORK, 28 FEB

The US Justice Department on Friday released a new set of Jeffrey Epstein files, following Attorney General Pam Bondi's promise to make the documents public.

The list which spans over 100 pages included Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger, pop star Michael Jackson, actor Alec Baldwin, Ethel Kennedy (mother of Robert F Kennedy Jr) and supermodel Naomi Campbell.

"This Department of Justice is following through on President Trump's commitment to transparency and lifting the veil on the disgusting actions of Jeffrey Epstein and his co-conspirators," Bondi stated in an official statement.

The release however also include logs from Epstein's infamous private jet, 'Lolita Express.' These records had been previously made public in a redacted form. However, some portions of the latest documents remain fully censored, particularly sections containing the names of Epstein's victims.

Two prior versions of Epstein's "little black book" had already been made public. *—Agencies*

The Justice Department released documents related to Jeffrey Epstein, including his contact list and flight logs. The release is termed 'Phase One', suggesting more information may follow **PHOTO: X**

Gold declines Rs 500, silver tanks Rs 2,100

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Gold prices declined by Rs 500 to hit a two-week low of Rs 87,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to reduced offtake from jewellery traders and investor selling, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity or pure gold had concluded at Rs 88,200 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. So far this year, gold prices have increased by Rs 8,310 or 10.5 per cent to Rs 87,700 per 10 grams compared to Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on 1 January. Extending the loss for the third day, silver prices also tanked by Rs 2,100 to hit a two-week low of Rs 96,400 per kg. The white metal had finished at Rs 98,500 per kg in previous close. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PIXABAY

Rupee falls 28 paise to close at 87.46 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

The depreciated 28 paise to close at 87.46 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as the strength of the American currency and a negative trend in domestic equities dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the ongoing uncertainty surrounding tariff imposition by the US has left financial markets in flux. Moreover, the tariff chaos has injected volatility and uncertainty into the US Dollar Index. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.32 against the greenback. During the session it fell to an intra-day low of 87.53 before ending the session at 87.46 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 28 paise from its previous close. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.08 per cent higher at 107.33. *—PTI*

TCS extends pact with Norway's DNB Bank by 5 years

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

India's largest IT services company Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Friday announced an extension of its partnership with Norway's largest financial services group, DNB Bank ASA, for an additional five years. It, however, did not divulge the financial details of the extended contract. With the renewed pact, TCS will continue as DNB's strategic partner, supporting the bank's digital modernisation, while enhancing cost efficiency targets, according to a release. TCS will also deploy next-generation technology for DNB's modernisation initiatives by maintaining and developing new applications, strengthening security capabilities, and providing insights on next-generation technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing. *—PTI*

Vodafone Idea receives Rs 16.73 cr GST demand order

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Telecom operator Vodafone Idea (VIL) on Friday said it has received a Rs 16.73 crore Goods and Services Tax (GST) demand order from Deputy Commissioner, Large Taxpayer Unit, West Bengal. The telco asserted it does not agree with the order and will take appropriate action for filing an appeal against the same. In a BSE filing on details of order received by the company under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017, Vodafone Idea informed that order was received on February 27, 2025. It pertains to "alleged excess availment of Input Tax credit, short payment of tax, etc," the VIL filing said. "The maximum financial impact is to the extent of tax demand, interest and penalty levied," VIL noted. *—PTI*

Bloodbath on D-Street: Mkts tank nearly 2%

Investors' wealth tumbled by Rs 7.46 lakh crore in morning trade; Sensex tanked 1,414.33 points

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled nearly 2 per cent on Friday, mirroring deep losses in global markets after the latest announcement of additional 10 per cent tariff on Chinese products rattled investors.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,414.33 points or 1.90 per cent to settle at 73,198.10. During the day, it plunged 1,471.16 points or 1.97 per cent to 73,141.27.

Extending losses to the eighth straight day, the NSE Nifty slumped 420.35 points or 1.86 per cent to 22,124.70.

Investors' wealth tumbled by Rs 7.46 lakh crore in morning trade on Friday, in-tandem with a sharp decline in the domestic equity market, with the benchmark Sensex plunging over 1,000 points following a bearish trend in global equities.

Following the sharp decline in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 7,46,647.62 crore to Rs 3,85,63,562.91 crore (USD 4.42 trillion) in morning trade.

From its record peak of 85,978.25 hit on 27 September last year, the BSE benchmark index is down 12,780.15 points or 14.86 per cent. The Nifty dropped 4,152.65 points or 15.80 per cent from its lifetime high of 26,277.35 hit on September 27, 2024.

BSE firms eroded by Rs 7,46,647 crore to Rs 3,85,63,562 cr ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

Relentless foreign fund outflows and concerns about the US economic outlook made investors jittery, according to analysts.

From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra slumped over 6 per cent followed by IndusInd Bank which tanked over 5 per cent.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, Tata Motors, Titan, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle and Maruti were also among the major laggards.

HDFC Bank emerged as the only gainer from the pack.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 556.56 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

The BSE Sensex eked out marginal gains of 10.31 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 74,612.43 on Thursday.

The Nifty slipped 2.50 points or 0.01 per cent to 22,545.05. *—PTI*

- Extending losses to the eighth straight day, the NSE Nifty slumped 420.35 points or 1.86 per cent to 22,124.70

Asian shares skid, hit by AI doubts and tariff hikes

BANGKOK, 28 FEB

Shares retreated Friday in Asia, with benchmarks in Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea falling more than 2 per cent after Wall Street indexes fell sharply on doubts over the frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology.

President Donald Trump's decision to push ahead with 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada and to double tariffs on Chinese products to 20 per cent also left investors reeling.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index lost 3.4 per cent to 36,939.89, pulled lower by plunging prices for shares in technology companies.

Superstar stock Nvidia, one of Wall Street's most influential companies that's been leading the market for years, lost 8.5 per cent. *—PTI*

Adani eyes retail & F&B segments at airports, malls

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

The Adani Group is set to expand its retail business by tapping into over 270 million travelers passing through its airports annually. Aiming to diversify its non-aeronautical revenue, the group plans to venture into more than two dozen retail categories, including electronics, beauty products, chocolates, alcohol, lifestyle items, and food and beverages.

Gaurav Singh, CEO of Adani Airport and Ospree, revealed that the company aims to control nearly all airport retail operations over time. "We're expanding from about 50 stores this year to 310 next year, including 270 retail outlets and 40 F&B spots," Singh said. The company is also exploring growth opportunities beyond airports, targeting highways and malls.

Adani Airport Holdings Ltd, which operates seven airports across India, including Mumbai and Ahmedabad, aims to boost non-aero revenue to nearly 75% from less than half currently. The company is also planning city-side developments around airports, featuring retail, hospitality, entertainment, and office spaces.

Meanwhile, Infra stocks jumped on Friday, after receiving orders worth Rs 1,764 cr from Adani

The shares of this small-cap stock, offering a diversified range of construction and allied services came into focus in Friday's trading session. *—Agencies*

STOCKS THAT FELL

Tech Mahindra	(-98.30 pts)	Rs 1,488.90	-6.19%
Wipro	(-17.00 pts)	Rs 277.65	-5.77%
Indusind Bank	(-57.35 pts)	Rs 988.95	-5.48%
Mahindra & Mahindra	(-141.95 pts)	Rs 2,584.00	-5.21%
Bharti Airtel	(-80.10 pts)	Rs 1,569.60	-4.86%

India needs 7.8% growth to be high-income nation: World Bank

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

India will need to grow at an average 7.8 per cent to become a high-income country by 2047, a World Bank report said on Friday.

To achieve this goal India would require reforms in financial sector as well as in land and labour market, the World Bank said in its India Country Memorandum titled 'Becoming a High-Income Economy in a generation'.

Recognising India's fast pace of growth averaging 6.3 per cent between 2000 and 2024, the report notes that India's past achievements provide the foundation for its future ambitions.

"To meet this target, given the less conducive external environment, India would need to not only maintain ongoing initiatives but in fact expand and intensify reforms," the World Bank report said.

PHOTO:ANI

In recent years, India has introduced a host of structural reforms to transform the country into a global manufacturing hub, to boost infrastructure, improve human capital, and leverage digitization, while at the same time bolstering macroeconomic stability.

World Bank India country director Auguste Tano Kouame said lessons from countries like Chile, Korea and Poland show how they have successfully made the transition from middle to high-income countries. *—PTI*

- Recognising India's fast pace of growth averaging 6.3 per cent, the report notes that India's past achievements provide the foundation for its future ambitions

MAINTAINING FUNDS SUSTAINABLY

EPFO retains EPF interest rate at 8.25% for 2024-25

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has decided to maintain the interest rate on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits at 8.25 per cent for the fiscal year 2024-25. This decision was made during a meeting of the EPFO's Central Board of Trustees (CBT) on Friday. The interest rate was previously raised from 8.15 per cent for 2022-23 to 8.25 per cent for 2023-24.

Historically, EPFO has faced fluctuating interest rates, with the lowest recorded at 8.1 per cent for 2021-22, marking a significant drop from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21. The current rate of 8.25 per cent matches the rate set for 2011-12 and is a continuation of efforts to enhance returns for over seven crore subscribers.

Following the CBT's decision, the interest rate will be submitted to the Ministry of Finance for approval. Once ratified by the government, the new rate will be credited to the accounts of EPFO subscribers.

Notably, the interest rate was reduced to 8.5 per cent in March 2020, a seven-year low, which prompted concerns among subscribers. Prior to that, EPFO offered interest rates ranging from 8.55 to 8.75 per cent over the previous decade. The new interest rate reflects the ongoing challenges in providing robust returns while managing the fund sustainably. *—PTI*

UPI transactions hit record 16.99B in January

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

UPI transactions in January surpassed 16.99 billion and the value exceeded Rs 23.48 lakh crore, marking the highest number recorded in any month, the Finance Ministry said.

For 2023-24, the digital payments landscape has demonstrated remarkable expansion, the finance ministry said in a statement.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) remains the cornerstone of India's digital payment ecosystem, contributing to 80 per cent of the retail payments across the country, it said.

The total transaction volume exceeded 131 billion and the value exceeded Rs 200 lakh crore for the 2023-24.

Its ease of use, combined with a growing network of participating banks and fintech platforms, has made UPI the preferred mode of real-time payments for millions of users across the country, it said.

PHOTO:ANI

As of January, 2025, over 80 UPI Apps , 641 banks are currently live on UPI ecosystem, it said.

In FY 24-25 (till Jan, 2025), the People to Merchant (P2M) transactions contributed 62.35 per cent and P2P transactions contributed 37.65 per cent of the overall UPI volume, it said.

The contribution of P2M transactions reached 62.35 per cent in January, 2025 where 86 per cent of these transactions are up to a value of Rs 500, it said, adding, this indicates the trust that UPI enjoys among citizens for making low value payments. *—PTI*

India and Japan renew $75B currency swap deal

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

India and Japan have renewed the USD 75 billion bilateral currencies swap agreement, the Reserve Bank said in a statement on Friday.

The Bilateral Swap Arrangement (BSA) is a two-way arrangement where both authorities can swap their local currencies in exchange for the US dollar.

The Bank of Japan, acting as agent for the Minister of Finance of Japan, and the Reserve Bank of India signed the Second Amendment and Restatement Agreement of the BSA, the central bank said.

The renewed BSA is effective Friday (28 February, 2025).

It further said that Japan and India believe that the BSA, which aims to strengthen and complement other financial safety nets, will further deepen financial cooperation between the two countries and contribute to regional and global stability. *—PTI*

Job stress among youth more in IT and media sectors: Study

T'PURAM, 28 FEB

Young employees working in IT sector (84.3 percent) and media (83.5 percent) are experiencing higher levels of work stress in Kerala, according to a survey conducted by the state Youth Commission.

Kerala Youth Commission chairman M Shajar presented the survey report to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday in the presence of state Minister for Fisheries, Culture and Youth Affairs Saji Cheriyan.

According to the survey, about 80.6 per cent employees from banking and insurance sector and 75.5 percent from gig economy have also reported work stress.

Employees working in retail and industrial sector related comparatively lower level of work stress, said the report prepared based on a survey conducted among employees in the age group of 18-40 years.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

As many as 1,548 employees from five sectors-- IT, gig economy, media, retail/industrial, and banking/insurance participated in the survey.

The study showed that highest level of work stress among the respondents in the age group 30-39 years. Work stress is found to be slightly higher among women (74.7 percent) employees as compared to men (73.7 percent).

A significant majority of both women and men reported that their work-life balance is compromised (68.25 percent) due to workload. *—PTI*

SEBI CHIEF

Bureaucrat at helm of mkt regulator for 3 yrs

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Seasoned bureaucrat and a stickler for rules Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey will be at the helm of capital market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), for three years.

The post of SEBI chief has been mostly held by seasoned bureaucrats.

This is the second appointment of a bureaucrat at the helm of a regulatory body in as many months. In December 2024, the government had appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as RBI Governor following the superannuation of Shaktikanta Das.

Soft spoken Pandey is known for sticking to the rule book and getting the work done.

It was under his tenure as DIPAM secretary, that Air India was privatised after many unsuccessful attempts in the past.

Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey ***PHOTO: ANI***

Pandey will take over as the head of the SEBI at a time when markets are witnessing bear pressure following a withdrawal by foreign institutional investors (FIIs). Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have withdrawn more than Rs 1 lakh crore since January.

Pandey was the longest-serving secretary in the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), a department in the finance ministry that manages government equity in public sector companies, as well as the DPE.

Pandey was instrumental in the privatisation of Air India. On October 8, 2021, the government declared the Tata group as the winning bidder for Air India. The conglomerate had put in a bid of Rs 18,000 crore.

Pandey also oversaw the privatisation plans of the IDBI Bank. The bidders are currently undergoing the due-diligence process.

At the Centre, his previous positions include Joint Secretary, Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog), Joint Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat and Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce. *—PTI*

Buch's term saw many reforms, was rocked by Adani row

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Madhabi Puri Buch, the first woman to lead India's Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is set to conclude her three-year tenure today.

Buch, who took charge on 2 March 2022, has had a significant but tumultuous term, making strides in areas such as quicker equity settlements and enhancing disclosures for foreign portfolio investors.

However, her leadership faced challenges, notably allegations of conflict of interest from US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research amidst controversies surrounding the Adani Group.

Despite these claims, Buch reaffirmed her commitment to transparency, asserting her investments predated her regulatory role and complied with all disclosure norms.

Her career spans leading positions in renowned institutions, including ICICI Bank, where she held roles in marketing, product development, and operations over 12 years before becoming the CEO of ICICI Securities from 2009 to 2011.

Raised in Mumbai and an alumnus of IIM Ahmedabad, her professional journey took a notable turn during the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, from which she emerged unscathed.

As her tenure concludes, Buch's influence on India's landscape remains significant. *—PTI*

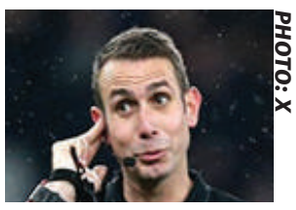


PHOTO: X

UEFA bans English referee Coote till 2026

LONDON, 28 FEB

English referee David Coote has been banned by UEFA until June 30, 2026, European soccer's governing body said Friday. Coote was fired by English soccer's refereeing body in December after a video was posted online of him making offensive comments to friends about former Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp. UEFA also launched an investigation into Coote following another video appearing to show him snorting white powder in an incident that allegedly happened during last year's European Championship. In the latest decisions published by UEFA's control, ethics, and disciplinary body, Coote was banned from any UEFA refereeing activity for violating the "basic rules of decent conduct" and bringing "the sport of football, and UEFA in particular, into disrepute." "My sexuality isn't the only reason that led me to be in that position. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Soviet world chess champion Boris dies at 88

MOSCOW, 28 FEB

Boris Spassky, a Soviet-era world chess champion who lost his title to American Bobby Fischer in a legendary 1972 match that became a proxy for Cold War rivalries, died Thursday in Moscow. He was 88. The death of the one-time chess prodigy was announced by the International Chess Federation, the game's governing body. I don't think there was any cause given. Spassky was "one of the greatest players of all time," the group said on the social platform X. He "left an indelible mark on the game." The televised 1972 match with Fischer, at the height of the Cold War, became an international sensation and was known as the "Match of the Century."—*PTI*

Sharma shoots season-best 66 to be T-4 in SA

DURBAN, 28 FEB

Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma put together his best round of 2025 as he carded a six-under 66 to be Tied-4th on the weather-affected opening day of the Investec South African Open Championship. Sharma, who has missed all four cuts on the DP World Tour this season, had five birdies and an eagle against one bogey. The lead was shared by Sam Bairstow (65) and Fredrik From, who landed two eagles. Sharma started with a birdie on the tenth and added more gains on the 14th, 15th and 17th. —*PTI*

UTT season 6 to begin from 29 May in Ahmedabad

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The sixth edition of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT), the sport's premier league in India, will be held from 29 May to 15 June in Ahmedabad, the organisers announced on Friday. The state-of-the-art EKA Arena, a venue that has staged the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup and 2019 Intercontinental Cup (football), will be the venue for the event that will be in Ahmedabad for the first time. As UTT continues to grow, eight teams featuring top Indian and international table tennis stars will battle for the crown, with defending champions, the Goa Challengers, looking to claim a historic third title. "Ultimate Table Tennis has been instrumental in transforming the table tennis landscape in India—*PTI*

Australia qualifies for semis after rain washes out game

Match was halted by a downpour when Australia were 109 for 1

LAHORE, 28 FEB

Australia entered the semifinals of the Champions Trophy after their crucial Group B clash against Afghanistan was called off due to rain here on Friday. The match was halted by a downpour when Australia were 109 for 1 in 12.5 overs, chasing a target of 274.

Despite the ground staff's efforts to clear the field, several pools of water remained on the pitch, and the umpires ultimately declared the match abandoned after an inspection. The interruption came just an hour before the cut-off time for completing the match.

With the game called off, Australia advanced to the semifinals with four points. Their last match against South Africa in Rawalpindi was also abandoned. At the time of interruption, Travis Head was in superb form, having scored 59 runs off 40 balls, including nine fours and one six.

Travis Head (left) hit a quickfire 50 in the rain-affected match in Lahore PHOTO: X

His knock came after a lucky reprieve when Rashid Khan dropped him on six, diving at mid-on off Fazalhaq Farooqi.

Head capitalised on this opportunity and dominated the Afghanistan bowlers, particularly taking 28 runs off Farooqi's 17 balls.

Skipper Steve Smith was at the other end, playing a more measured knock with 19 not out from 22 balls, including two boundaries.With no result from this match, Afghanistan's chances are slim and would depend on the result of Saturday's match between South Africa and England.If South Africa wins, they will top the group with five points. If England emerges victorious, South Africa and Afghanistan will both finish on three points, leading to a net run-rate (NRR) calculation.Afghanistan's current NRR of -0.99 would almost certainly eliminate them unless South Africa loses. —*PTI*

CT POINTS TABLE

GROUP A	M	W	L	PT
1. NZ	2	2	0	4
2. IND	2	2	0	4
3. BAN	3	0	2	1
4. PAK	3	0	2	1
GROUP B	**M**	**W**	**L**	**PT**
1. SA	2	1	0	3
2. AUS	3	1	0	4
3. ENG	2	0	2	0
4. AFG	3	0	1	3

Pak players may skip NZ tour

LAHORE, 28 FEB

Some of the senior Pakistan players could withdraw from the next month's New Zealand tour in the aftermath of the team's embarrassing exit from the Champions Trophy, sources said on Friday.

Pakistan exited the home event without winning a single game as it began the campaign with a heavy 60-run defeat against New Zealand in Karachi and then lost by six wickets to arch-rivals India in Dubai.

Former captain Moin Khan on Friday said Pakistan can't go any worse than the current hapless situation and it's time that the authorities start rebuilding the team and senior players justify their place in the side. Pakistan have been eliminated from the home Champions Trophy after failing to win a single game.

"I am listening to the comments of many former players nowadays, but since we are already losing, why not just build a new team? —*PTI*

South Africa look to seal SF spot in clash against Eng

KARACHI, 28 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

As the battle for the semifinals intensifies in Group B, top-ranked South Africa will aim to assert their dominance and secure a spot in the final four when they face a struggling England in a high-stakes Champions Trophy clash here on Saturday.

Unlike Group A, wherein the two best sides, India and New Zealand, have sailed through with ease into the knockouts, Australia, Afghanistan and South Africa in Group B are locked in for an intense battle over the two days for the remaining two semifinal berths.

A crushing loss by eight runs to Afghanistan not only sent England out of the contention for the semifinals but also kept the Asian team's hopes alive of making it to the final four, which has kept both South Africa and Australia on tenterhooks.

The Afghans had pushed Australia to the brink in their last meeting in the 2023 ODI World Cup before Glenn Maxwell's sensational 201 not out turned the tables.

While there are possibilities of the contest being affected by rain, a win for Afghanistan will be enough for them to seal a spot in the semifinal, as Australia's defeat will leave the Steve Smith-led side locked in for a battle with South Africa for the second and final spot from this group.

A favourable result should not be too difficult for South Africa, who have all their bases covered and, more importantly, have their key players in-form compared to a misfiring England, who are overly dependent on Joe Root. —*PTI*

RANJI TROPHY FINAL

Dubey breaks most wicket record

NAGPUR, 28 FEB

Vidarbha edged ahead in an attritional Ranji Trophy final against Kerala by eking out a 37-run first-innings lead on day three with Harsh Dubey (3/88) creating a record for most wickets by any bowler in the tournament's history on Friday.

The young left-arm spinner has taken 69 wickets so far this season, eclipsing the 68 by Bihar's Ashutosh Aman in 2018-19.

Kerala skipper Sachin Baby struck a valiant 98, and Aditya Sarwate fought hard for his 185-ball 7,9, but Vidarbha held their nerve to gain a vital lead after dismissing the visitors for 342. Vidarbha had made 379 batting first.

Sarwate fell in the first session, while batting mainstays Salman Nizar (21) and Mohammed Azharuddeen (34) could not convert their good starts into big scores as Dubey, Darshan Nalkande (3/52), and Parth Rekhade (3/65) returned three-wicket hauls each.

Vidarbha's star spinner Harsh Dubey in the frame PHOTO: PTI

Vidarbha vs Kerala
Match starts at
9.30 am IST

Sarwate was the first to depart, becoming Dubey's 67th victim. The 22-year-old then dismissed Nizar to get to a record-equalling 68th dismissal.

Brief scores: Vidarbha 379 in 123.1 overs (Danish Malewar 153, Karun Nair 86; MD Nidheesh 3/61, Eden Apple Tom 3/101) lead Kerala 342 in 125 overs (Aditya Sarwate 79, Sachin Baby 98; Darshan Nalkande 3/52, Harsh Dubey 3/88, Parth Rekhade 3/65) by 37 runs. —*PTI*

Leicester's slide continues with 2-0 loss to West Ham

LONDON, 28 FEB

West Ham handed relegation-threatened Leicester its fourth straight Premier League loss by beating Ruud van Nistelrooy's team 2-0.

Leicester failed to score in each of those defeats and allowed a total of 12 goals to remain 19th in the standings, five points from safety. The Foxes have lost 11 of their past 12 league games.

Tomas Soucek scored in the 21st minute for the home team at London Stadium, and the Hammers doubled the lead when Jarrod Bowen's strike deflected off Jannik Vestergaard for an own goal just before half-time. Leicester shook up its coaching staff after last Friday's 4-0 home loss to Brentford but kept Van Nistelrooy in charge.

West Ham United's Tomas Soucek celebrates scoring during the English Premier League soccer match PHOTO: X / @WESTHAM

In 14 Premier League games under the Dutch manager, Leicester has two wins, one draw and 11 losses.

"We were way too passive," Van Nistelrooy told TNT Sports. "Of course, we're in a situation where we're not winning games, and we're in a situation where we are in the bottom three, and the pressure's on. But I think the way to get out of it is to move forward on the pitch as well. We have to take initiative."

West Ham moved past Everton into 15th place and has recorded back-to-back Premier League wins for the first time this season. —*PTI*

Liverpool reports losses of $71.8 million

Liverpool reported pre-tax losses of 57 million pounds ($71.8 million) in its latest financial accounts on Friday.The losses came despite the Premier League club reporting record commercial revenues of 308 million pounds ($387.8 million) for the year.The accounts for the year ending May 31, 2024, underline the importance of Champions League qualification for England's leading clubs, with Liverpool pointing to a sizeable fall in media revenue due to its absence from the competition last season.

F1 testing halted after a shuttle bus drives on track

SAKHIR , 28 FEB

The afternoon session of Formula 1 preseason testing was briefly interrupted Friday when a shuttle bus drove on the track.

In a bizarre scene, a red flag was waved to halt testing as a white bus drove slowly on a runoff area of the track at Bahrain International Circuit.

It wasn't the only oddity of the day.In the morning session, there was a brief red flag after a pane of glass fell from the starter's box and shattered on the edge of the track. Workers quickly arrived with brooms and swept up the shards.

Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc was fastest on the morning of the final day of testing.

Andrea Kimi Antonelli, the 18-year-old rookie who took over Lewis Hamilton's spot at Mercedes, was next at .077 off the pace, followed by McLaren's Lando Norris and then four-time defending champion Max Verstappen for Red Bull.

Hamilton, who said Thursday he's " really enjoying " his Ferrari, drove in the afternoon session.

Friday is the third and final day of preseason testing. The first race of the season is the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on 16 March. —*PTI*

REAL MADRID AND FC BARCELONA LEGENDS TO CLASH IN INDIA SOON

LONDON, 28 FEB

Football legends Luis Figo of Portugal, World Cup-winning Brazilian Rivaldo, and Spaniard Fernando Morientes will play in an exhibition match between Real Madrid and Barcelona legends at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on 6 April.

The "Legends Faceoff" will be played at the DY Patil Stadium, the organisers said in a release. While Rivaldo, Figo, and Morientes are already confirmed, more superstars are set to be unveiled soon for the match to be organised by The Sports Front. The rivalry between Barcelona and Real Madrid, popularly known as the 'El Clasico', is one of the fiercest rivalries in the world. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Atiqa Mir PHOTO: X

ATIQA IS 1ST INDIAN TO BE SIGNED BY F1 ACADEMY

PORTIMAO, 28 FEB

10-year-old karting sensation Atiqa Mir on Friday became the first Indian and Asian to be signed by Formula 1 Academy for its driver program, a testament to her rapid growth in the world of motorsport.

F1 Academy, a female-only racing series owned by Formula 1, has decided to take Atiqa on board for its Discover Your Drive (DYD) Program after closely tracking her stellar performances on the karting circuit.The racer from Jammu and Kashmir is only one of three drivers in the mini category (ages 8-11) worldwide to be chosen for the DYD program.

Atiqa will represent Formula 1 Academy at the Champions of the Future Academy Program Championship with six rounds in Europe and the Middle East, starting this weekend.

F1 Academy is investing in Atiqa's rare talent by providing financial and technical support, covering her fitness, driving, and mental preparation.Being signed by F1 Academy is a major stepping stone in Atiqa's blossoming racing career, and she duly realizes the significance of this opportunity."

I'm so excited to hear this amazing news. —*PTI*

SINNER'S SPORTSMAN OF YEAR NOMINATION WITHDRAWN POST BAN

LONDON, 28 FEB

The nomination of Jannik Sinner for the Laureus sportsman of the year award was withdrawn because of the top-ranked tennis player's three-month ban for his two positive doping tests nearly a year ago.

Laureus World Sports Academy chairman Sean Fitzpatrick said in a statement on Thursday that the Italian player's ban resulting from a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency prompted the decision.

"Following discussions by the Laureus Academy, it has been decided that Jannik Sinner's nomination for this year's Laureus world sportsman of the year award is to be withdrawn," Fitzpatrick said.

"We have followed this case, the decisions of the relevant global bodies and whilst we note the extenuating circumstances involved, feel that the three-month ban renders the nomination ineligible. Jannik and his team have been informed."

Sinner and WADA announced the settlement on 15 Feb.—*PTI*

AFTER CT EXIT

Buttler quits as England's white-ball captain

LONDON, 28 FEB

Jos Buttler has resigned as captain following England's early exit from the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 in the group stages.

He will stand down after their final match of the campaign against South Africa on Saturday in Karachi.

"It's the right decision for me, it's the right decision for the team, and hopefully somebody else can come in and work closely alongside [Brendon McCullum] to take the team back to where it needs to be," he said in a press conference on Friday.

"It was quite clear that this tournament was going to be important results-wise for my captaincy," he added, saying that he was sad and disappointed, but he felt he had "reached the end of the road."

His side lost their Group B matches against Australia and Afghanistan.He added: "With Brendon coming in only recently, I was excited to work closely alongside him and hope for a very quick turnaround and take the team forward, but it's not worked out that way. It feels like it's the right time for me and also for the team to have a change."Asked whether it felt like a relief to hand over the mantle of leading the team, Buttler demurred, describing it as "an immense honour to captain your country." —*PTI*